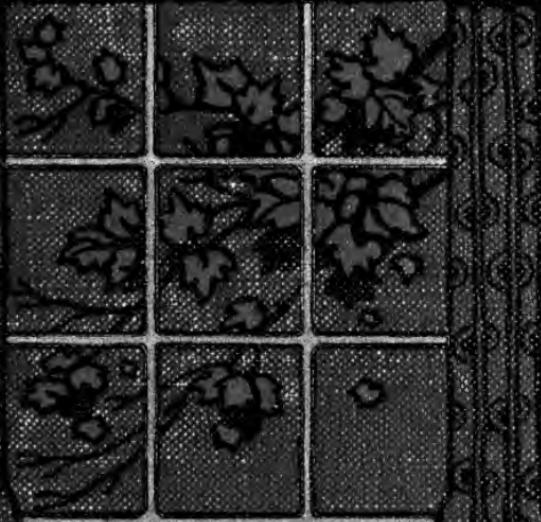
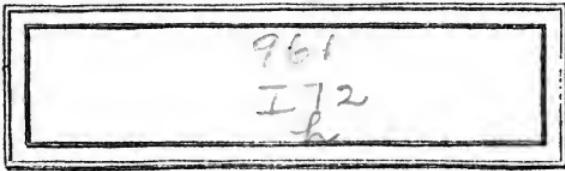
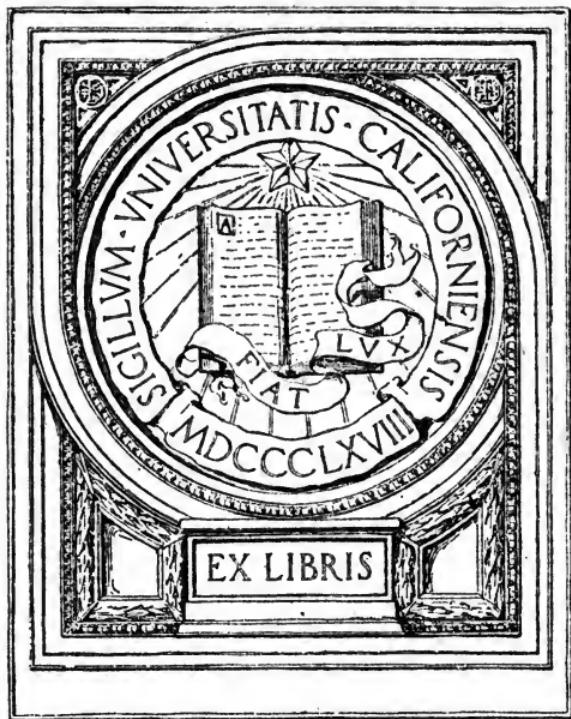


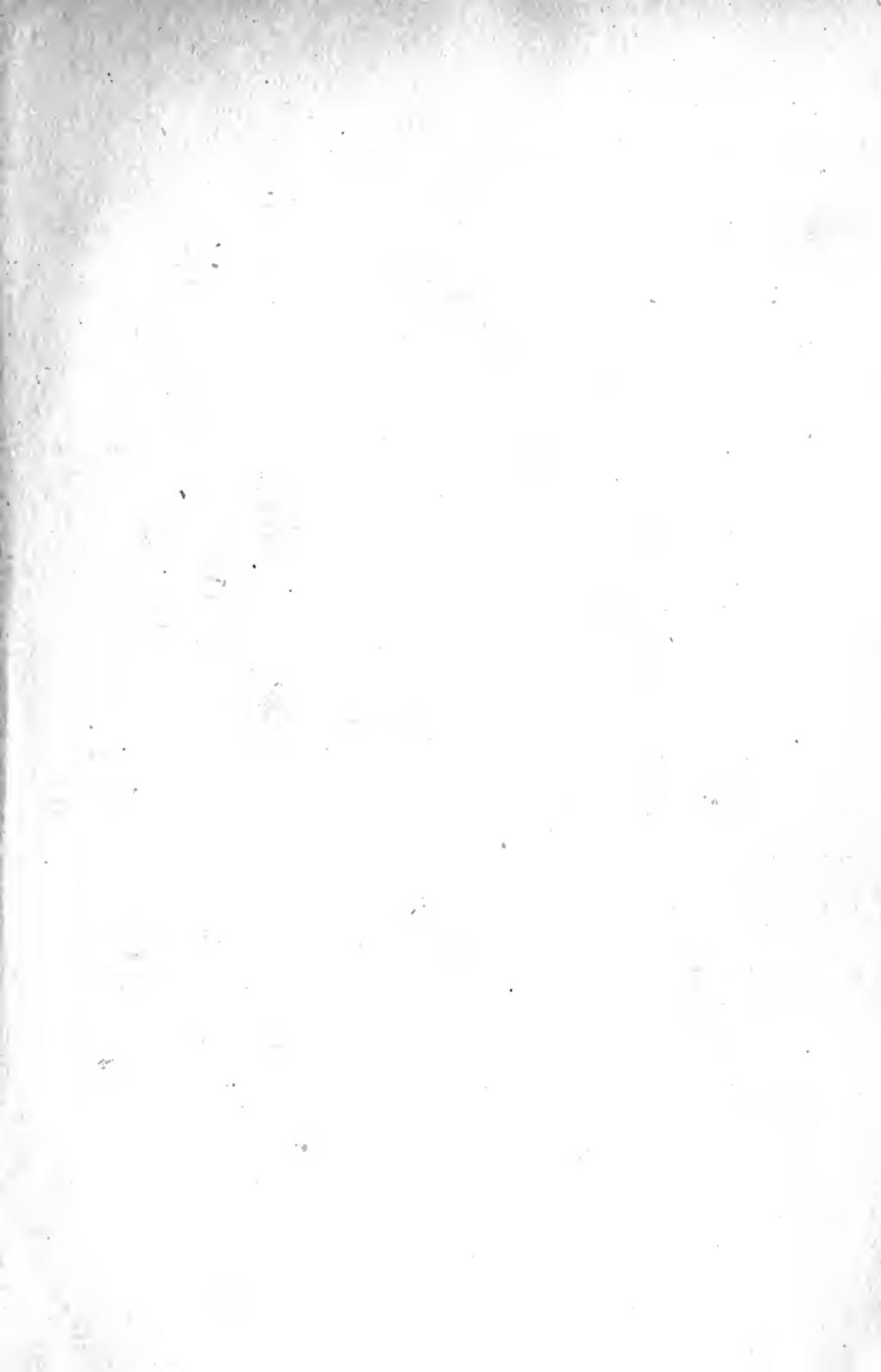
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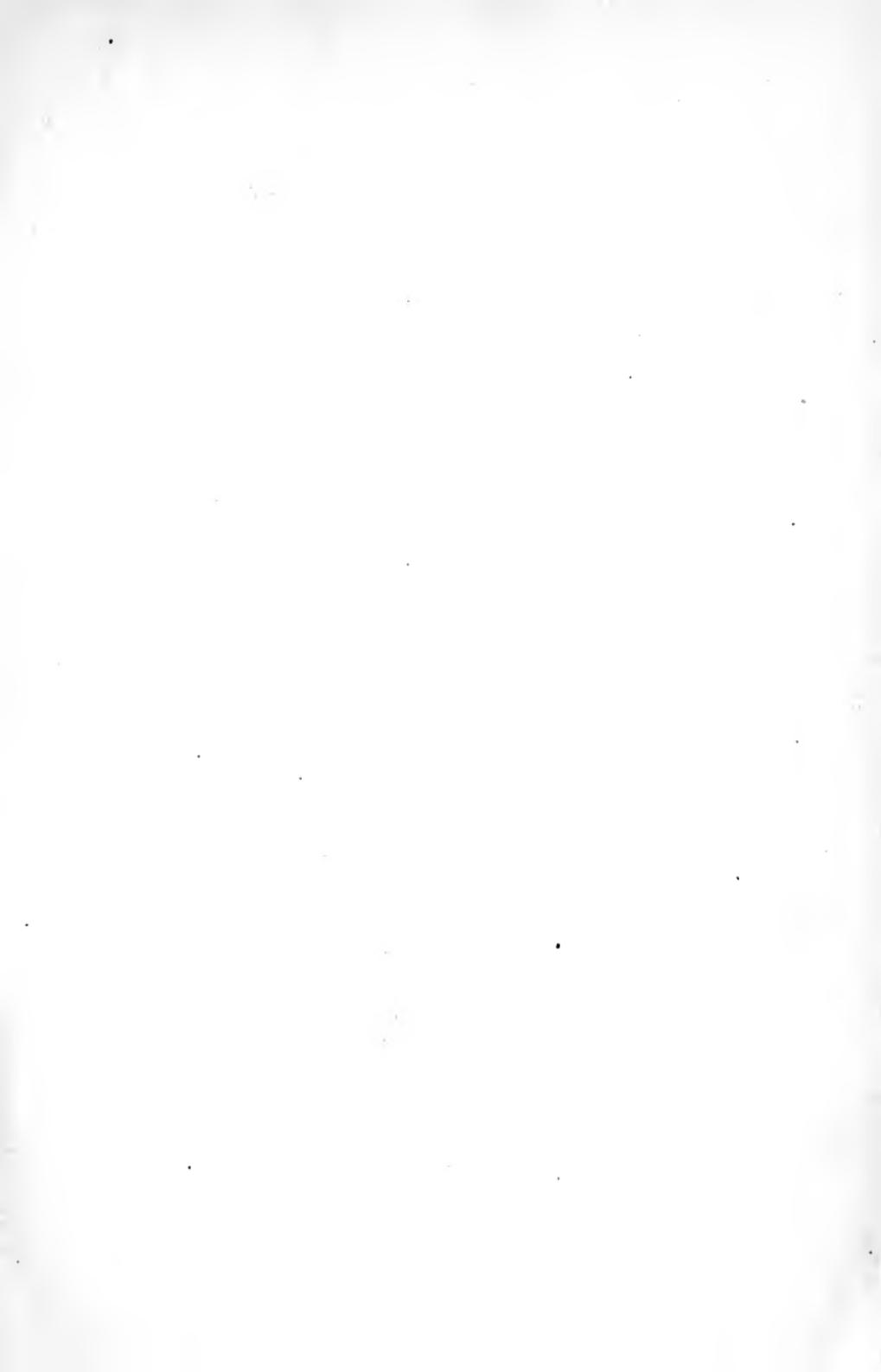
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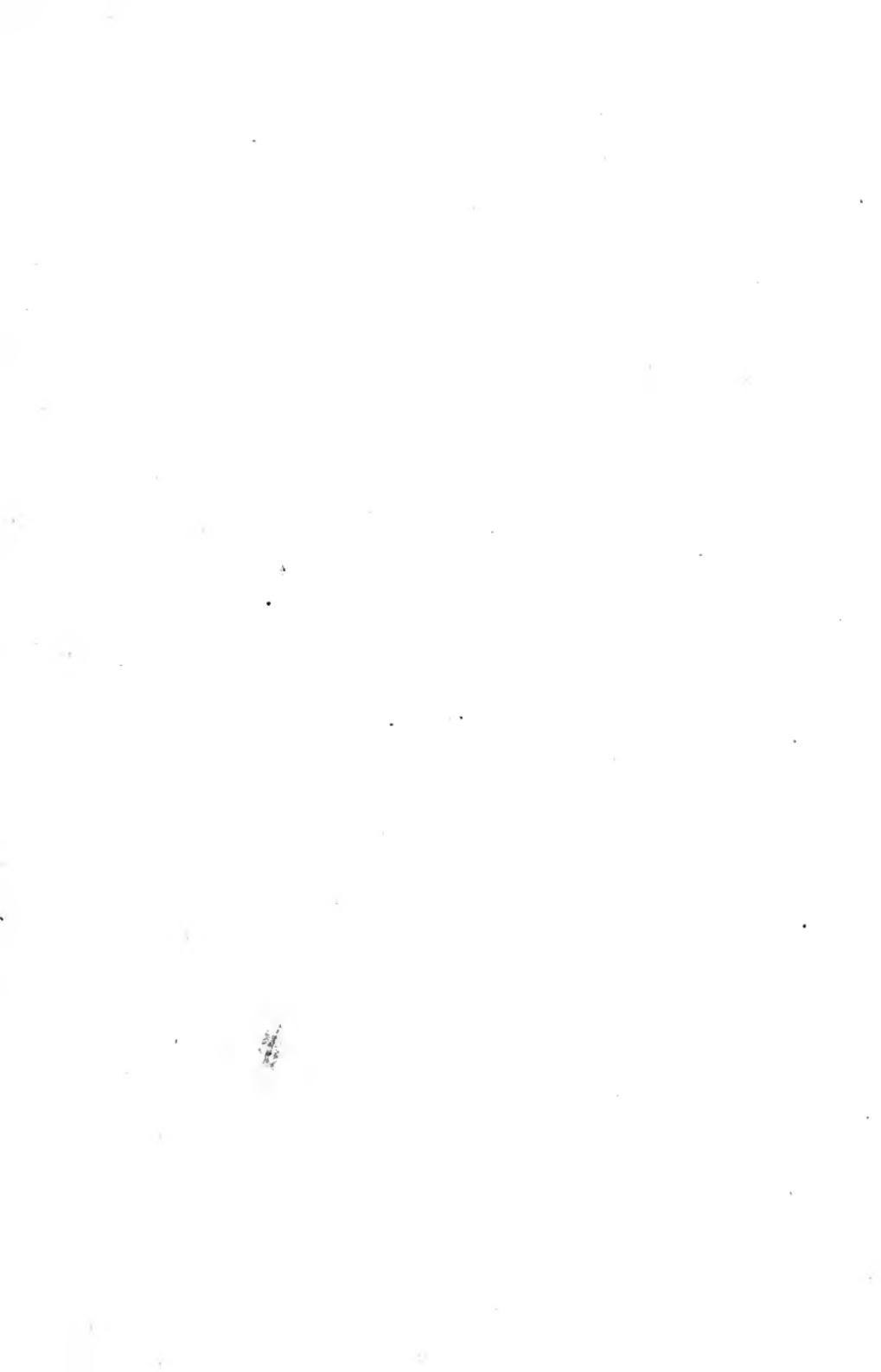
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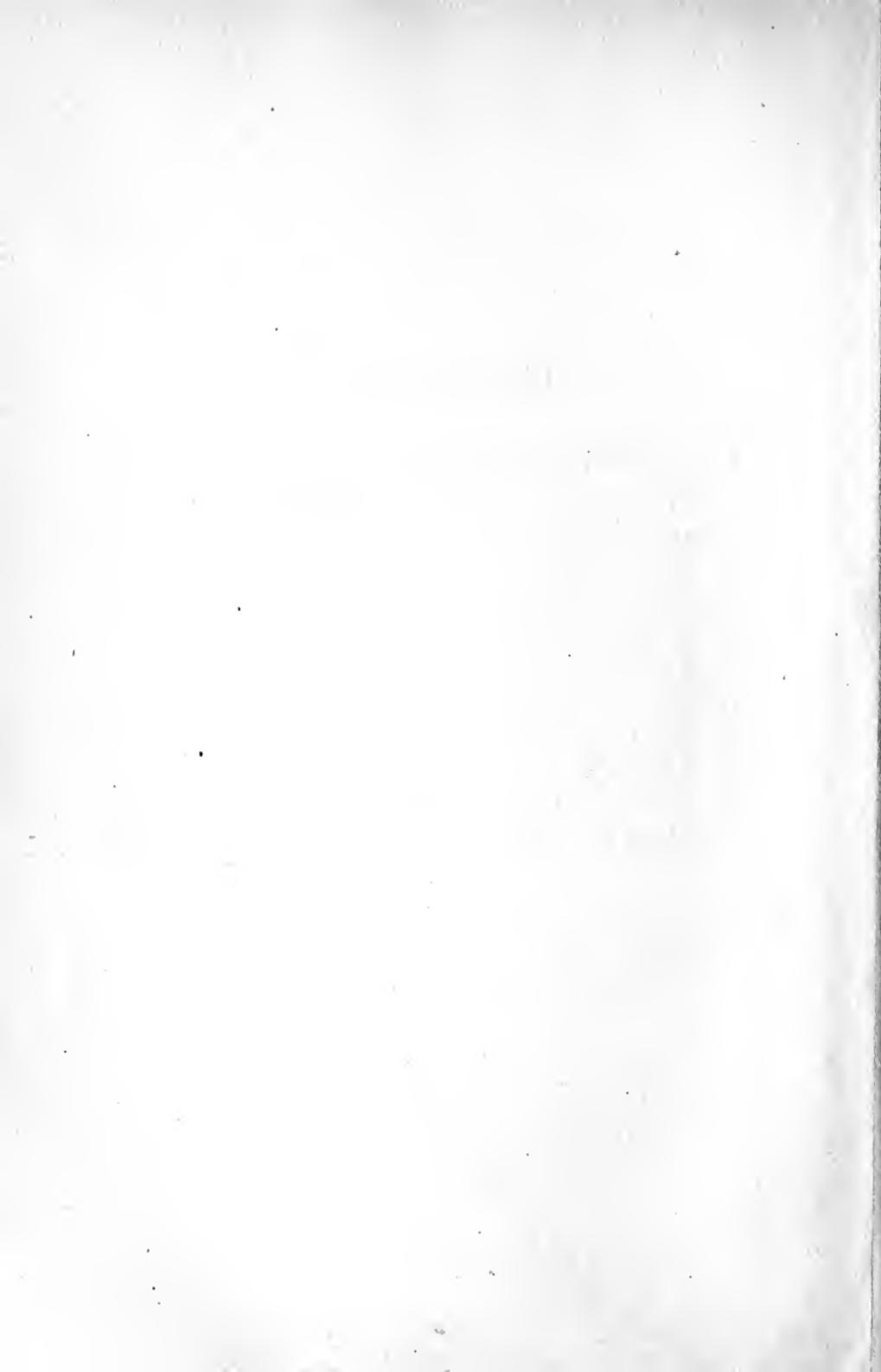
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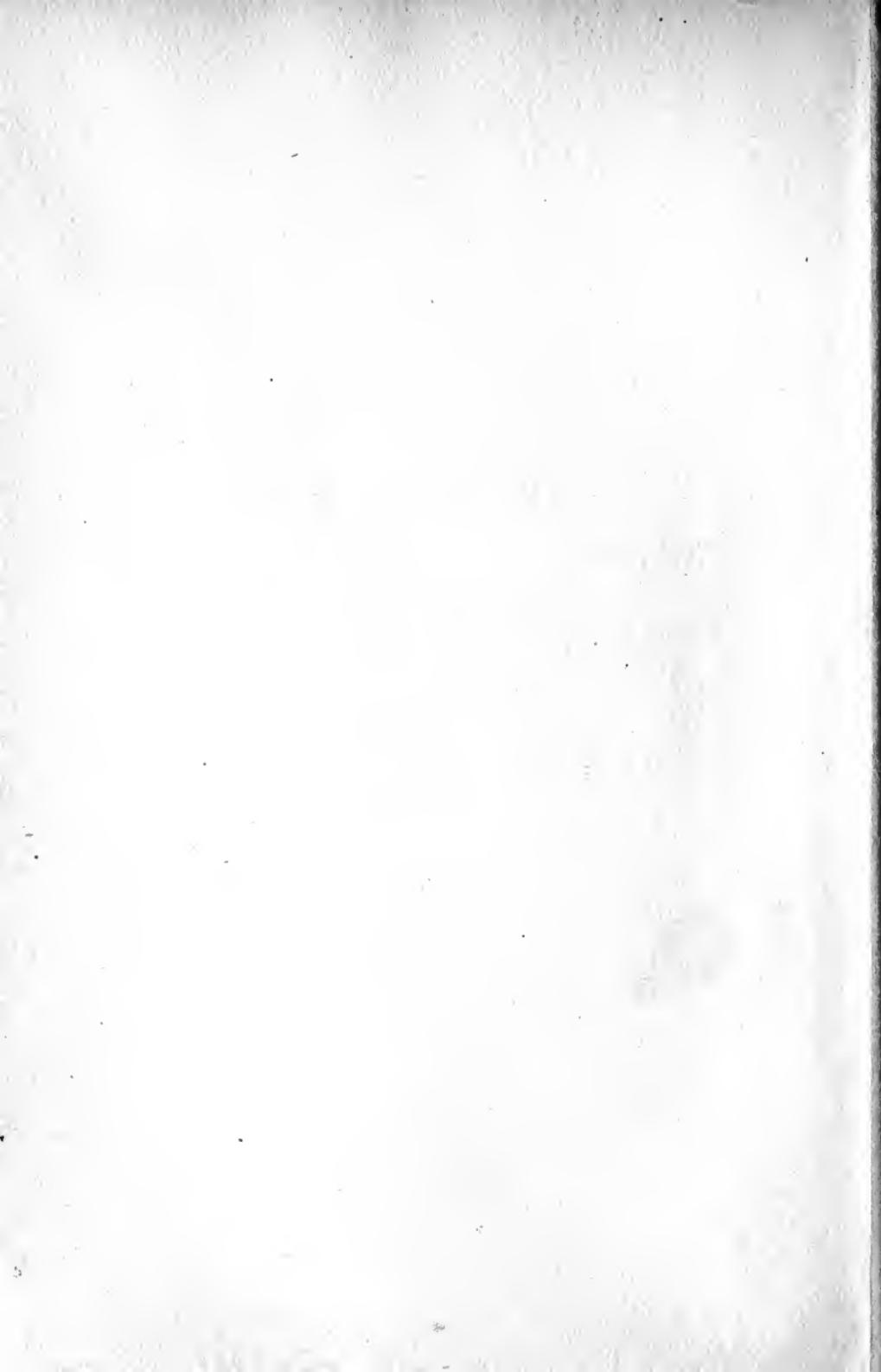
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THE HAPPY YEARS



CHAPTER I

IF YOUTH BUT KNEW

"**A**H, here you are, Ern!" Phoebe Warburton exclaimed in a relieved tone as she dropped into the seat beside her brother on the five o'clock express. "I was afraid you'd taken the four-twenty-seven, and there's something I want to talk over with you. About half Maywood takes this car, don't they? Goodness what a warm day this has been! October fools me regularly every year. . . . Oh, good afternoon, Mrs. Hunt. How's little Ellie? That's good. . . . Cold spells early in the month! Haul out the children's winter coats, mufflers, leggings, gloves, and then about the middle it goes back to summer again. Take off all the winter things, and every blessed one of them gets cold. I've been in town this whole livelong day. I never was so tired in my life—or so hot—and I must be a perfect sight!"

"Look all right to me," Ernest said, surveying her with the calm of brothers.

Phoebe Warburton—she had been Phoebe Martin and one of the prettiest girls in Maywood—had

THE HAPPY YEARS

grown from that pretty girl to a handsome woman. She was in the middle thirties now, but she did not look it; for much of her girlhood lingered in her. Child-bearing had filled out the willowy wand that had been her figure, but it had not diminished its suppleness and erectness. Maturity had rounded out the girlish peak that had been her face, but it had not solidified or dulled it. As ever the vivacity of her body showed itself in the quickness and sureness of her motions. As ever the fluidity of her spirits displayed itself in the extravagance and fervor of her expressions. And as ever the warmth of her sympathy expressed itself in an immediate response to the nearest mood and atmosphere. Energy splashed from her; vitality sparkled in her; her face was lustrous with happiness. Yet sometimes a thought that pierced all this, brought a change of expression to her eyes—a look wistful and poignant—as though continually she asked a question that Fate continually refused to answer.

Now, Phoebe's face glowed with a depth of color that had for the time become almost plum-like in tint. A faint pearly dew studded her brow and upper lip. Nevertheless, she maintained her characteristic sartorial trimness. Veil, gloves, shoes remained crisp. The thick waves of her golden-brown hair still stayed where she had placed them that morning. Every line of her plain tailored suit

seemed to emphasize the virility of her figure. She carried a shining black traveling bag.

"What you been doing all day, Phoebe?" Ernest asked.

"If you will believe it—Christmas shopping! I've always said I'd do it sometime, and this year I'm making good on my resolution. . . . How do you do, Mr. Pebworth! Yes, the candlesticks are lovely! Thank you so much for letting us know about them. . . . I've registered a solemn vow to take Christmas by the forelock. I've cleaned out all the drawers in Aunt Mary's maple highboy. I've bought brown paper and white paper and tissue paper and red ribbons and green ribbons and everything but Christmas tags and seals—they aren't on sale yet—and I've made a solemn vow to myself that by the first of December every gift will be bought, done up, tagged, and packed away in the highboy."

Ernest laughed. "Sounds like a fairy tale. Of course, like all men, I hate Christmas! I'm with that man who wants to start a Scrooge Club. I'd like to be president of it. I'm glad to think that this year there'll be one woman not running around for the last three days before Christmas like a hen with her head cut off, and ready to go into a sanitarium the morning of the twenty-sixth. Are you enjoying it?"

"I loathe it!" answered Phoebe. "Of course, it's unphilanthropic and uncivil and unsocial and *uneverything*, but I must admit that I perfectly adore the Christmas rush. . . . Oh, hullo, Mary—say, are you *ever* coming to committee meeting again? Well, see that you do. . . . I love to run around in the stores with crowds and crowds and crowds of other people, all just as excited as I am. Everything always seems Christmas-sy and gay to me. I don't care how skimpy the shop Christmas-tree decorations are, or how unconvincing-looking the shop Santa Clauses or how artificial the shop holly and mistletoe! I just love it. And if the weather is good, with snow on the ground and lots of sunshine, I feel as if I should skip and leap just as I did when I was a child. I know I shall miss it like the very dickens this December—staying at home with my hands folded. I'll feel as though somebody's died and it's the day after the funeral."

"Then what are you doing it for?" Ernest demanded with an amused smile.

"Oh, I'm just obeying the Christmas order 'Shop Early.' I'm doing it out of pity for the over-worked store-girls. Sometimes I wonder if they don't enjoy it, too—I mean the sense of rush and go and excitement. Oh, of course, I know they *don't*. They *can't*. They must be ready to drop with exhaustion, and yet, I'm not sure that they want it

to be as calm at the Christmas season as any other. . . . Good afternoon, Phil. Yes, come up any time. Now run along, I want to talk with Ern."

"Oh yes, what was it you wanted to talk over?" Ernest inquired.

"About father and mother," Phoebe answered. "Thank goodness, the train's started. Nobody'll interrupt us now. Isn't it funny how irritating it is to sit in a train if you're waiting for it to start and how uncomfortable you get if it stops and stands unexpectedly anywhere? Yes, I've been thinking a lot about father and mother lately, and do you know, Ern, for the first time in my life I've had the feeling that they were getting old."

"Old!" Ernest repeated. "Old! Nonsense! I can't think of father and mother as old, somehow. I never shall, I suppose."

"I never have before," Phoebe said. "But somehow in the last few months there's been a difference. Mother doesn't seem to interest herself in anything any more. Oh, of course, she's crazy about our children, but . . . Oh, how do you do, Mr. Morton! How's Mrs. Morton? That's nice. . . . And of course, father always falls into the pace that mother sets. He always has. I shouldn't say *pace* now—it's a rut. I do wish we could get them out of it, Ern—mother'll take orders from *you* like a lamb. I've tried, in a way, but you

know mother will never come to the dinner parties Tug and I give. She says she doesn't enjoy being with a crowd so much younger than herself. And I can't seem to get her to go to the Woman's Club. The women there who are most interested, Mrs. Hunt and Mrs. Richards, scold me all the time for not bringing her oftener; but she's the hardest person in the world to pry out of her regular habits."

"Yes," Ernest agreed. "I've always realized that of course, but I don't think I've noticed any special difference in her lately."

"There is, just the same," Phoebe insisted. "There's something gone—I don't know exactly what it is. Yes, I do, too. I guess we've got to reconcile ourselves to the fact that they're getting along. Middle-age has gone and old-age is coming."

Ernest looked out of the window a moment, and for that moment a shade of deep reflection wiped out what boyish values still lingered in his face. He was as handsome as his sister, though in another type. Big-figured, blue-eyed, and black-haired; personality, flamboyant but tempered, glowed back of his comeliness. Maturity had subdued him from a colorful adolescence by lining him a little, but the lines had only added a shadowing subtlety. Like Phoebe, he possessed an instinctive sartorial smartness which seemed never to permit his clothes to look old or shabby. Unlike her, an underlying seri-

ousness often broke through his debonair expression, creased lines on the freshness of his coloring.

"I haven't thought of mother as growing old at all," he said at last. "A man doesn't notice what a woman's doing. But now you speak of it, I recall something father said the other day. Toland and the twins ran to meet us as we came up the street. We hadn't been talking for a moment or two, and suddenly father broke out as though he were answering some argument he'd raised in his own mind. 'It's those little shavers that are pushing me into the easy-chair by the fire,' he said, 'I don't know as I want to go, but they insist on it.' He said that as though it had just struck him—it had nothing to do with what we'd been talking about. Well, even if they are old, it isn't such a terrible tragedy, Phoebe. It's the way of all flesh. It's the natural development of life. Old-age can't be averted or avoided, if you live long enough. Why not look it square in the face, admit it, and make the best of it?"

"I suppose you're right." Phoebe emitted a sigh that was half reluctance and half impatience. "Only it does seem to me that they're not old enough yet to be old. And there are some things that break my heart. For instance—mother was never very *crazy* about clothes, but now her complete indifference—Why, I don't know *when* she's had any-

thing new, and of course she can have anything she wants. If they'd only get out evenings, and go to something—anything—I don't care what. But night after night, they just sit and read and nap and talk a little and then go to bed. Yes, I suppose I've got to reconcile myself to it. They're old. My father and mother are old. Well, let's make a compact, Ern. We won't ever mention it to anybody else and we'll never let them suspect that we know it, never, never, never."

" You're on," approved Ernest.

Phoebe stopped at her mother's house on the way from the train. Coming unexpectedly, as she did, into the living-room, she found Mrs. Martin seated alone, looking vacantly out the window into a vista of twilight so pale that, in it, the street lamps made blobs of yellow color rather than golden light. " What are you mooning about, mother? " Phoebe demanded briskly. " I hope the children haven't worn you out."

" No, they never wear me out," Mrs. Martin answered. " They're always quiet. I've had such a nice day with them."

" Was Edward good? "

" As good as gold! I think he's the best baby you've ever had, Phoebe."

" You've said that about every one of them except

the first," Phoebe accused her mother. "He may not be the best behaved, but he certainly is the best looking. If I do say it as shouldn't, he's the *swellest*"—Phoebe smiled at this verbal reminiscence of her girlhood—"youngster in this town."

"You ought to have a miniature painted of him," Mrs. Martin said. "Those curls—and those great gray eyes and such red lips!"

"I'd like to see Tug Warburton's face," Phoebe declared, "if I should propose to him having his son's picture painted. If it were Bertha-Elizabeth——Or Phoebe-Girl——Have the children been gone long?"

"Only a few minutes," Mrs. Martin replied. "And I miss them already. You don't know how I love to hear children's voices in the house. It brings back those early days when your father and I first took it. You know it was I made your father buy this place. He didn't feel we could afford it. I was sure we could carry it. But after we'd signed the papers I got an awful scare. It seemed such a terrible debt that we were shouldering. I was afraid then that we never could pay it off! But the instant we got here and I had all these nice airy rooms and that great big kitchen to work in and you children that lovely yard for your play—I never had another instant of doubt but that I'd done the right thing. I brought you children up in this house and

it doesn't seem quite natural not to have children here. If I had known you were coming home on this train I'd have kept them until you got here."

"I'm glad you didn't," Phoebe declared. "They'll be all washed up and tidy when I get home. Besides, once in a while, mother, I like to have a little talk with you when they're not about."

"Did you get all your shopping done?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Yes, as much as I could do in one day," Phoebe answered. "How do you feel, mother? You look a little tired."

"Yes, I do feel a little tired." Mrs. Martin's eyes wandered to the garden with its shrunken, shriveled flower beds; then to where the trim suburban houses across the street stood in line; above to the twilight sky where a crescent moon rocked; beyond into infinity. Then abruptly her look came back to her daughter's face. "Do you know, Phoebe, lately I've had the queerest feeling. I don't know exactly how to describe it. I don't know exactly what to make of it, but it's as though life were slowing up a little. I suppose it's all perfectly natural when you stop to think of it. Before you children were married and were living at home, this place was full of activity. Of course, I was the head of the house and everything that came up was referred to me and I had to settle it. Seems to me, as I look back

upon it now, there was a new question and a new problem and a new responsibility every single day. Then you both got married and started homes of your own, your children came along and instead of being mother I was grandmother. There's a great deal of difference between being grandmother and being mother. Not that I don't like being grandmother; I do. I enjoy it a great deal. I'm proud of it, but I have a queer feeling as though all responsibility had been taken from me. Delia and Mary have been with me so long that they know my ways perfectly. I hardly have to give them orders any more. No machine could run any better than this household does. I feel that I haven't any real work to do—I mean work that depends absolutely on me. I haven't the feeling I had when I was bringing you two children up. Of course, I have a certain sense of responsibility in regard to my grandchildren, but it isn't a real responsibility. They're a great pleasure. I enjoy them in a way that I couldn't enjoy you, because I always had to train you, to see that you got the right habits and the right point of view on things. But I don't feel that way about them. Why, Phoebe,"—Mrs. Martin looked at her daughter as though she expected to horrify her with the revelation she was about to make—"often when they do the *naughtiest* things, I don't pay any attention to them at all. It's

such a joy to think that I haven't got to scold or punish them. I just let it go by. I pretend not to see it."

"I don't know, mother, but what you've discovered a great principle of child-training," Phoebe said after an instant of reflection.

Mrs. Martin received this apathetically. "But in the last few days," she went on, recurring to her former train of thought, "I've been thinking about this queer listless feeling, and suddenly it came over me what it might be, Phoebe. It's old-age. It took me a long time to understand it, but perhaps that's what it is. Old-age! Phoebe, is that it? Is your mother old?" She stopped and looked a little helplessly at her daughter.

Phoebe's gray eyes filled with swift tears, and after a while, though more slowly, her mother's eyes filled, too.

"Old!" Phoebe lied indignantly. "Old! Nonsense! You're not old, mother. You never could be old."

That night after dinner, just as his father was establishing himself in the big Morris chair by the big center table, Ernest strolled into the living-room.

"Oh, Ernie!" His mother jumped to her feet. She kissed him. "How glad I am to see you! You don't get around very often now."

"No, I've been working a lot nights lately," Ernest said.

"How is Sylvia?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Never better. And in such good spirits. She hasn't been so happy since the twins were born."

"That's good," Mrs. Martin commented.

"I wondered, father," Ernest went on, "if you would like to go down to the banquet of the Business-Men's Club tonight—it's too late for the feed; but we can listen to the speeches. They say there's going to be some good speakers this evening—ex-Governor Talcott, Senator Middleton, and that Socialist mayor from Missouri who's been in the papers so much—let me see, what's his name?"

"Shaw," Mr. Martin supplied.

"I hear the Business-Men's Club is going to make things hum this coming year," Ernest went on. "Ever since Murray was elected president, there's been a lot of activity all along the line. I really think there'll be something doing there tonight."

"No—guess I won't, Ernest," Mr. Martin replied immediately. "I don't feel like going out tonight."

"Oh, you'll feel like it all right when you get there," Ernest urged. "Buck up and come along, Dad!"

"No,—guess I won't, Ernest," Mr. Martin repeated, smiling but determined.

"Why not?" Ernest demanded. "You haven't anything else to do."

"I know I haven't," Mr. Martin agreed. "The plain truth is that I don't want to go."

"Well, you ought to want to go," Ernest declared argumentatively.

"Maybe," Mr. Martin admitted. "But I'm through with that stuff now—I'm leaving it to you young fellows. You see, Ernest, when a man has reached that point in life when his business seems to go automatically—oh, I don't mean to say he's not interested in new schemes—but nevertheless it goes by itself—when he finds himself all the afternoon looking forward to that quiet, simple, well-cooked dinner that he knows is waiting for him at home and to the long evening that follows it; himself in front of the fire, his wife sitting near him in a big chair, the dog yawning on the hearth and the cat snoozing beside him, his pipe and tobacco on a little table at one side, and his papers and the magazines on a big table at the other—and that's about all he wants out of life, except to have his children and grandchildren come around—I guess he's got to face the truth and admit to himself that he's getting along."

"Oh, quit your kidding, father!" Ernest adjured Mr. Martin. "What rot! You make me sick! Come on down to the club with me."

Mr. Martin shook his head decisively. "Don't think I will."

"Oh, you're a quitter, father!" Ernest accused, retreating. "Good night, mother. I'm sorry you married Rip Van Winkle."

"You said to Ernie just about what I said to Phoebe this afternoon," Mrs. Martin remarked after her son had gone. "I told her that I'd reconciled myself to the fact that I was getting on in years, and she'd better reconcile herself to it, too."

"What did Phoebe say?" Mr. Martin asked with interest.

"She said I wasn't, of course," Mrs. Martin answered. "But she cried—and I cried, too."

"Of course the children take that sort of thing pretty hard," Mr. Martin offered after a pause. "They don't know what fun we're having."

"I'm glad you love our home so, Edward," Mrs. Martin said wistfully. "I love it myself. I'm so happy here. I always have been. This house seems to hold in it the history of the life we've been through together—the children growing big and going to school and falling sick and getting into trouble—and all the family misfortunes and blessings."

She looked about the big living-room as though trying to get a new point of view on what held a sweet familiarity: comfortable, roomy, modern

furniture, many plants which dropped trailing green growths or flecks of bloomy color against paper and woodwork; photographs of children and grandchildren in every period of growth and every combination of group. The room showed a reposeful orderliness; it held a quiet air of serenity, to which the silvery ticking of the old grandfather's clock in the corner, the yawns of the collie on the hearth, the occasional rising and stretching of the cat, gave touches of an affectionate domesticity.

"Yes, it rests a man so after a long day at the office," Mr. Martin said. "I hate to hear the door-bell ring sometimes just because it means interruption, and I have moments when I wish we never had had a telephone put in the house."

"There! There's the telephone now!" Mrs. Martin exclaimed. "You invited that, Edward, by saying what you did. I'll answer it." She went out into the hall.

In spite of his professed hatred of interruption, Mr. Martin listened attentively.

"Hello! Hello!" came to him from Mrs. Martin. "Yes, this is Mrs. Martin—oh, good evening, Mrs. Richards—oh, yes, you'll always find us at home in the evening—yes—yes—yes—no, I don't go very often—I don't know why exactly—yes, I suppose I ought to—oh, I don't believe I could—it's very kind of Mrs. Hunt, and I feel that it is

a great honor to have been asked, but I haven't any faculty for that sort of thing—I hate to ask people for anything, especially money—I'm sure I'd be a great failure—there are so many other women who can do this ever so much better than I can—oh, Mrs. Richards, I couldn't. I really couldn't. You don't know how—sort of—shy and awkward I am with strangers. I'm sure I won't have any success whatever—well, of course, if you put it that way, I don't see what else there is for me to do—I'll say 'yes' then, but don't expect anything from me—and please tell Mrs. Hunt what I've said, so she won't expect any more of me than I can do. Of course, I'll do the best I can."

"What are you stung for?" Mr. Martin inquired when his wife re-entered the room.

"Well," Mrs. Martin answered with an unaccustomed use of slang, "I guess that's what's happened. I'm stung all right. It's the sort of thing that I hate to do, and yet I don't see how I could get out of it, the way Mrs. Richards put it to me. It's hard to refuse people over the telephone—I don't know why. I suppose you've heard me say or Phoebe say—that the Maywood Woman's Club has been trying for a long while to raise money for a new clubhouse. They've always held their meetings in the Town Hall or the High School Hall. They're good enough in their way, of course, but it would

be much nicer to have a building of our own. The women say that if they had a pretty, comfortable little hall with a roomy stage and good dressing-rooms, and a convenient kitchen for serving refreshments, that we could make quite a bit of money renting it for theatricals and dances and dinners and lunches and teas. I've always been very strongly in favor of it, but I've never interested myself much in it because—well, it's never come my way before. They had plans drawn up several years ago. The kind of clubhouse we want will cost ten thousand dollars. We've bought the land—that money was the first we raised and it didn't come so hard. But getting money for the clubhouse has been a long pull. The committees have done everything they could think of. They've given plays, lectures, concerts, whists, bazaars, picnics—and rummage sales—and dances—and cabaret shows—anything and everything to make money. But we still need four thousand dollars before we can start things."

"Well, what do they want *you* to do?" Mr. Martin asked.

"This year they've got a new idea. They say everybody is so busy that they're going to try a new scheme and see what can be done by asking people to contribute cash outright. Mrs. Richards says that there are a lot of people that would rather do that than give up an evening to go to something, or

have to buy things they don't want. So Mrs. Hunt, the president, has appointed a committee of twenty women to collect contributions of money. She wants them to get all they can of course, but to make it a point not to get less than two hundred each. There will be a meeting of the finance committee three weeks from today in the afternoon at Mrs. Richards' house."

Mr. Martin whistled. "Four thousand dollars out of this little town in three weeks. Impossible! Can't be done!"

"That's what I told them," Mrs. Martin said. "But they said it wouldn't do any harm to try, and anyway what money we did get would be just so much gained. Of course, of all the things in the world that they *could* ask me to do, they've struck on the one that's hardest—to try to get money out of people. I haven't any knack for that. I don't know how to go about it. I guess it's because for so many years money was so scarce with us, Edward, that I put an undue value on it. It seems to me as though I were asking people for their heart's blood. I told Mrs. Richards and she said they all said that. Now, Phoebe would be perfectly wonderful at that sort of thing. Phoebe's like all the present generation—she takes money for granted. And how she spends it! She's not extravagant exactly, but she doesn't seem to have any *respect* for money!"

Mrs. Richards told me they'd asked Phoebe to go on this committee, but she's so busy with a million other things, she had to say 'no.' Well, you know what Phoebe's life is like."

"That's the most encouraging thing I've heard about Phoebe in a long time," Mr. Martin commented grimly, "that at last she's said 'no' to something. Why didn't you put your foot down too, Bertha?"

"I don't know exactly," said Mrs. Martin. "Except that to say 'no' is the hardest thing in the whole wide world for me to do. And then Mrs. Richards said that they'd got nineteen of the twenty women."

"Well, have you any idea you're going to get that two hundred dollars?" Mr. Martin demanded quizzically.

"No, I don't think I'm going to get it," Mrs. Martin admitted humbly. She added with a sudden access of spirit, "But I know I'm going to try."

"Well, I suppose if I had any of the milk of human kindness in my system, I'd hand you a check for the whole amount now. I wouldn't be surprised if that's what I did in the end. But I guess as long as you've undertaken this, Bertha, you'd better find out what you're up against. You won't say 'yes' so easily the next time. Besides, your enterprising

daughter has already stung me three times for this clubhouse fund."

" You don't think I can raise it?" Mrs. Martin questioned.

" Not a chance," Mr. Martin answered.

" Oh, by the way," Mr. Martin said the next evening, " do you remember that banquet that Ernest tried to take me to last night? Well, I guess I missed a trick. They had a great session. That man Murray is certainly putting new blood into the Maywood Business-Men's Club. Ever since he got back from California, he's been a different man. He came into the office to see me this afternoon. He's got a great scheme on hand. It seems that the twenty-third of next May is a great day in Maywood history, the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the sale of what is now the township to Myles Morrowdale by the Indians. I'd forgotten all about that, if I ever knew it. Murray seems to think that we ought to celebrate, a dinner or a meeting—or something. They seem kind of hazy about what they do want. There's only one thing that they are certain of—they must have a silver-tongued orator. Murray got the club all het up over it. He came in to see me about a program —wanted me to suggest somebody to speak. Well, we ransacked our brains for names. I gave them all

I could think of—ex-Governor Myrick first, but Murray said that he was too dull. And I agree with him. Then I suggested old Colonel Denton—I knew just exactly what he would say to that. He's grown so childish that he rambles on and on and there's no stopping him. Then I said Robson, but he was out of the question and I knew it—he's so terribly unpopular. Then I mentioned Fair. Murray said they'd thought of him, but he would be away. I couldn't think of anybody else and he couldn't think of anybody else, and we left it there. Oh, yes, Murray didn't seem entirely satisfied with that kind of meeting—asked me to think, if I could, of some more suitable way of celebrating the day."

"That's a rather important event—the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary," Mrs. Martin observed. "Seems to me they ought to have something better than just a meeting and a speech."

"I thought so, too," agreed Mr. Martin. "I've been thinking of it ever since. You know, the Martins—Micah Martin's branch—were the first family to settle in Maywood after the Murrays bought the land. We've lived here from father to son for several generations. You remember the old graveyard over the river—well, that's crowded with Martins. I was born here, but my father moved away when I was about twelve. I always loved this town though, and never forgot it. Always thought I'd

want to come back some day. I'm glad we left though, because if we hadn't I never would have met you. It's queer how these things work out. Just as soon as I got engaged to you and I knew I was going to have a home and, likely, a family, my thoughts all went back to Maywood. I said to myself, 'I'm going back to that little town where all my ancestors lived.' It was just as though they were calling me. Anyway, that was the motive that brought me here; and ever since I had that talk with Murray today I've been thinking about Maywood history and all the stories father and mother used to tell me."

"I remember when we first came here," Mrs. Martin said, "you were full of it. We visited that old graveyard—don't you remember? You told me more stories! And you had an idea that you wanted to buy what was left of the original Martin farmhouse and build on——"

"Yes, I had that idea," Mr. Martin explained, "but I never could get Abner Martin to loosen up on it. He doesn't seem to want it for anything, uses it for a sort of workshop; yet he won't sell it. But if it ever does come on the market—well, you watch me. Ernest ought to have it. My father told me that many's the time he's sat in the chimney-corner and listened to tales of the Revolution, told by men who fought in it. Lord! that used to bring it near.

There was one story father used to tell me that I always liked—I haven't thought of it for years. It happened on the day that Paul Revere came galloping through the countryside, warning the farmers that the British were coming. When he got to Maywood, about the middle of the morning, my father's grandfather, my great-great-grandfather, old Nehemiah Martin, was plowing. Paul Revere didn't stop, he just hollered across the field that the British were coming. Nehemiah ran into the house, got his gun and powder horn, ran out, kissed his wife and started down the road. That wife of his was a wonder, I guess. I think she must have been the man of the family, because all the nephews and nieces called her Aunt Nehemiah instead of Aunt Abigail, which was her right name. Well, anyway, when Nehemiah gets to the turn of the road, he turns around to wave to his wife; and old Aunt Nehemiah has taken his place at the plow and is working away as though she had done it all her life. I always liked that story. Sometimes I feel as though I ought to tell it to the Suffragists."

"They'd use it all right," Mrs. Martin commented.

"I couldn't seem to get that talk with Murray out of my mind," Mr. Martin went on, unheeding. "I've been thinking of it all afternoon long." He got up and began to walk back and forth, taking short,

quick pulls of his pipe. "It occurred to me that perhaps the best way to celebrate this anniversary would be to have one of those pageants that they're giving everywhere nowadays. If I get it right, a pageant isn't a play, but a series of historical pictures indicating the history of the town. After my mind got going on it, a whole lot of things came back to me that I'd clean forgotten—stories that father and mother used to tell. Then I began stringing them together. I think I'll go around and see Murray tomorrow and outline the thing as far as I've worked it out and suggest that we have an all-day celebration; games and sports in the morning, open-air pageant in the afternoon, banquet and speeches at night. I don't see why we should have to have any of these dubs around here make the address. I don't see why we couldn't get the Mayor of Boston, the Governor of the State—the President of the United States, for that matter."

"I think that would be a very good scheme," Mrs. Martin approved.

"Yes," Mr. Martin went on, as though talking to himself, resuming his seat. "I'm going around to talk to Murray just as soon as I can make it." Then as though this discussion brought up an associated train of thought, he added, "How are you getting along with that two hundred dollars you expected to raise?"

"Pretty well," Mrs. Martin said. "I made up my mind that I wasn't going to ask my friends for money—they've been asked for so many things lately. And so it occurred to me the other morning when I was dressing, that I'd go from house to house just like a book canvasser, put the whole case before the women—prove to them that this clubhouse would be a benefit to every woman and child in town and ask them for contributions of any sum from pennies up. You'd be surprised how nice people were. Of course, I started with the richest part of the town, but I had a much better time when I went across the river. At first I dreaded it like anything, but I began to have so much fun out of it that I've been doing it morning and afternoon ever since. I've got thirty-one dollars and sixteen cents. People are always so much more kind than we think they're going to be, and it's such an experience to go into the different houses and see how they're furnished and talk with the children. Oh, I've seen so many darling babies! Why, Edward, I've had regular adventures. One woman invited me to stay to lunch. All we had was baked potatoes and bacon and tea, but oh, wasn't it delicious! I was so hungry. Why, Edward, I've had some of the nicest talks with strange women. You couldn't have made me believe I'd enjoy anything so much."

"Oh, by the way, Bertha," Mr. Martin reverted

to his own interest. It was evident that Mrs. Martin's remarks had slid off a preoccupied mind. "If you ever get the chance, I wish you would bring up this two hundred and fiftieth anniversary business at some meeting of the Woman's Club. They probably would have some ideas, too. Women have so much more time to attend to such things."

"Oh, Edward, I couldn't," Mrs. Martin remonstrated, appalled. "In all the time I've been a member of that club, I've never spoken once. Often I've wanted to—and sometimes I've had good ideas on the subject under discussion—but I never could get up on my feet—that's one thing that's beyond me—making a speech."

"Well, mention it to them in one of your committee meetings," Mr. Martin suggested. "Or ask somebody else to bring it before the club."

"All right," Mrs. Martin agreed, "I'll remember to do that."

"You going out tonight, Bertha?" Mr. Martin said when he came home one night many days later.

"Yes. It is the annual meeting tonight at the club," Mrs. Martin explained. "Election of officers. I don't want to miss it. I expect there'll be an interesting time. Mrs. Hunt absolutely refuses to hold office again. She's been president for five years in succession, and she says they ought to let her off now,

and I agree with her. By the way, Edward, that committee of twenty—you know the one that was to raise the four thousand dollars—had its last meeting this afternoon; and I was the only one who had raised the two hundred. I got more—two hundred and seventeen dollars and three cents. The others had all raised something. They ranged from six to ninety-seven dollars, but I was the only one who came in with the whole two hundred. I feel very proud, and Mrs. Richards said after we made our report that it was most amusing, because I was the only one who said I was sure I couldn't do it. All the others were perfectly sure they could raise one hundred at least. Mrs. Richards asked me what my method was. Then I told them how I'd been canvassing the town. I got quite interested in what I was saying, and I guess I must have talked for fifteen minutes telling my experiences. I never did such a thing in my life. I was ashamed when I realized how much time I had taken, but they seemed to enjoy it. They laughed and laughed and laughed; and when I got through, they asked me all kinds of questions. I can't tell you, Edward, how set up I was." There was a triumphant light in Mrs. Martin's eyes and a faint color in her cheeks. "I'm sorry that committee work is over—I enjoyed the meetings so. I don't want to miss tonight. I'm sure it's going to be very exciting."

When, a few hours later, Mrs. Martin returned from the meeting, she let herself very quietly in at the front door, walked very quietly into the living-room and, without removing her hat and coat, without speaking, sat down very quietly by the fire.

"Won't you take your things off and stay with us a little while, Mrs. Martin?" Mr. Martin asked jocularly after an interval.

Mrs. Martin arose, took off her hat and coat, dropped them on the couch. But she still moved quietly, slowly, as one in a dream. "Edward, what do you suppose has happened?" she demanded abruptly. Before her husband could reply, she answered her own question. "They've elected me president of the Woman's Club."

"They have," Mr. Martin said. "They *have*. You *don't!* Well, how the thunder did that happen?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Martin answered. "I haven't the remotest idea. It's almost as much of a mystery to me as it is to you. It just happened—that's all. I suppose it was my raising that two hundred and seventeen dollars. Mrs. Richards did it. Three or four other names were suggested, but they elected me. Mrs. Richards told the club all about how I raised the money—*all* about it—she didn't leave out a word. I didn't want to be president, Edward, but I didn't have the courage to get

up on my feet and tell them so—and when they took me up on the platform—and everybody standing and applauding, I didn't know what I was going to do. And when Mrs. Hunt retired and left me there all alone in the chair and everybody began to clap again and I knew I had to make a speech—Edward, I never came so close to fainting in my life. I felt perfectly desperate until it just flashed into my mind to bring up that matter of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the settlement of Maywood. I told them the whole story—everything—just as you told it to me—and suggested that we co-operate with the Business-Men's Club to make it the greatest day that Maywood has ever known. Well, those women went perfectly wild over it. They were just full of ideas and plans. There'd be four or five on their feet at once, calling 'Madame President'! Lots of them told things that had happened in their family connected with the history of the town—and, Edward, some of it was mighty interesting. There was the greatest amount of applause and laughter, and all the time old Mrs. Mitchell was talking about Civil War times in Maywood, the tears were just streaming down her face. Many other women were crying. We never had such a meeting. The first thing I had to do was to appoint a committee of twenty-five to take the whole matter in charge and then a whole lot of smaller subcommittees. I don't know how I

did it, but my mind seemed to clear up—the way it always does when you have to do something. We're going to make a wonderful day of it. But, oh, Edward, think of me being president of the club!"

"I'm mighty glad of it, Bertha," Mr. Martin declared. "*Mighty* glad. It's the best thing could happen to you. You need it. And you'll make a splendid president. I guess this town's going to wake up pretty soon to the fact that they've got a remarkable woman in their midst."

"How you talk, Edward!" Mrs. Martin ejaculated.

"While you were gone," Mr. Martin went on, "Murray called me up and told me that he'd sounded the Governor—you know they're great friends—about his making a speech on the anniversary night. The Governor said he'd come through, and he thought that Opdyke, Secretary of State, who was a classmate of his at Harvard, could get the President to come, too. What do you suppose Murray said? He wants me to serve as toastmaster at the banquet that night—introduce all the speakers. I told him he ought to do that—and he *ought*—but he wouldn't hear of it. He said he never had done anything like it in his life and it was too late to begin. He insisted on my taking the job, and finally I said I would. That will be in the evening, of course, in the Town Hall."

"Oh, Edward!" Mrs. Martin exclaimed. "I'm so glad. I know you'll do it beautifully—you're always so brief and to the point and yet you say an awful lot—and funny, too! I've always said that the time would come that this town would wake up to the fact that they've got a remarkable man here. They're going to find out right now."

"Quit your kidding, Bertha!" Mr. Martin ordered.

"Well, Mrs. Martin," Phoebe said to her mother on the evening of the anniversary night. "You certainly are *some* president. The Woman's Club end of this program has been carried out beautifully. It was perfect—not a hitch anywhere. And as for this pageant—it was one of the most impressive things I ever saw in my *life*. I wept *buckets*. I felt all kinds of quivers of pride running up and down my spine when I reflected that we Martins helped to make this town. You certainly have been in the public eye this day. And tonight father does his grand stunt. I've come over to help you get dressed. It isn't often that my father and mother dine with the President of the United States, so you've got to be all right. What are you going to wear, mother? The gray?"

Mrs. Martin wore a long and dark kimona. On her head was a boudoir cap. "I've done something,

Phoebe," she answered, flushing slightly, "that I'm ashamed to tell you about. But all my life I've wanted one of those beautiful dresses that you see in those smart shops on Boylston Street. You know what I mean—all made, so I wouldn't have to bother about it. I was afraid you wouldn't let me have it, if I told you about it, so I went in town the other day all by myself and picked out—well, it's black tulle trimmed with silver."

Phoebe stared. "Well, good for *you*, Mother Martin!" she emitted finally. "Only you do me an injustice. Black and silver is perfectly respectable. Let me see it at once. How much did it set you back?"

"I'm ashamed to tell you," Mrs. Martin said with emphasis. "But it's a beautiful gown, if I do say it myself." She led the way to her chamber, where, suspended on a hanger on the closet door, was a slim, delicately figured mass of black tulle and lace; touched here and there with dashes of silver.

"It's a wonder!" Phoebe approved with enthusiasm. "I can see that. What's this under the sheet on the bed?"

"A new evening coat," Mrs. Martin said, "and a new evening hat."

Phoebe lifted the sheet. "Oh, what a beautiful brocade—it's like cloth of silver! Try it on, mother!" She slipped the wide-sleeved coat over her

mother's shoulders. "It's lovely—that deep collar of seal makes it so rich. 'The hat is awfully smart—I love a lace hat. And that silver rose on the brim is a *wonderful* touch. You're going to be considerable pippin, believe me. What else did you get? Out with it!"

Mrs. Martin opened the lower bureau drawer.

Phoebe plumped down beside it. She chuckled. "*Silver* slippers. I'm so glad you didn't get black. Oh, what lovely buckles, mother! I'm crazy about cut steel. And silver stockings!" With a smile still trembling on her lips, she looked into her mother's face. "Is that all?" she demanded. "Woman," she commanded, "confess *all* your guilt!"

"Well," Mrs. Martin said, shamefaced, "I had Madam Lily come out and do my hair." She removed the boudoir cap, which showed a structure of carefully waved coils and braids that first dipped a little low on the forehead and then retreating seemed to cover her entire head with a shining luxuriance. Everywhere gleamed hairpins of silver shell. "And while I was about it, I had my face massaged and my nails manicured."

Phoebe hugged her mother. Then she made Mrs. Martin put the new hat on. "It's a duck, mother—just big enough. And your hair looks lovely through it. I suppose if we both live to be one hundred years old, maybe I'll get your number, Mother Martin,

but as it is now, you're always surprising me. Oh, hello, Ern. What are you doing here?"

"I came up to look father over before he went on the platform tonight," Ernest answered from the doorway. "I was afraid he'd make some fierce sartorial break that would disgrace the Martin family forever. But I find, if you please, that he's bought new and up-to-date evening clothes, which include white gloves, silk socks, shiny pumps, a pearl-gray silk muffler—I'm beginning to suspect he writes 'What the Man Wears' for the theater programs. Sister, gaze on our father!" Ernest made an elaborate gesture as one putting on exhibition the figure that joined him in the doorway.

An hour later Phoebe and Ernest watched the limousine bear their father in the direction of the Murray house.

"Ern," Phoebe said, a glint of mischief brightening her misty gray eyes, "did I say something a while ago to you about mother and father being old?"

"I seem to recall that you did, Phoebe," Ernest answered. "And that I added remarks to the same effect."

"Well, I take it back," Phoebe declared.

"I renig also," Ernest agreed.

"I'm now going to my humble home," Phoebe

announced, "put on the blue evening dress that's left over from last winter, and the white evening coat that's left over from the winter before that, and the evening hat that's—no, I recall now I have no evening hat *whatever*—and follow those two gorgeous, giddy, gay young things to the hall and be a humble spectator from the gallery of their triumphs. I don't think I'll make any attempt to recognize them, however. I should hate to have the President of the United States know that the frump hiding in the shadows is their daughter."

"I also," promulgated Ernest, "will return to my humble cot. I will put on the evening clothes that I've worn ever since I was married, the overcoat that's two years old going on three, and the top hat that belongs in vaudeville, it's such a joke. I, too, will hie me to the hall where these magnificent young creatures are blooming into public life. I, too, will make no attempt to recognize them. I don't want the President of the United States to suspect that the tramp cowering in the corner is their son."

"Well, take heart, Ern. Maybe when we get to their age, we'll have a good time, too."

"Maybe. Anyway, Phoebe, I'm beginning to look forward to it."

CHAPTER II

PHOEBE AFFECTS AN EXCHANGE

THAT Saturday afternoon in early June was hot, but the Warburton place echoed with noise and seethed with activity. Outside, the noise was greater perhaps and the activity less, although the tennis doubles were in vigorous swing. Inside, noise and activity were almost equal. Upstairs, a clatter of footsteps, the brisk, quick movements of men, the stubby stumble of a boy, resounded from the bare floors. Downstairs, the treble accents of a little girl pattering from dining-room to kitchen and back again, sustained an interminable argument with unseen presences. Above all this surged the roar of water flowing into two bathtubs, growing loud and then dull again as doors opened or shut; and into it poured constantly the staccato purr of the telephone.

"Mother, where did you say the opera glasses were?" the boy upstairs called, interrupting Phoebe, who was entertaining Professor Halliway downstairs.

"Now listen this time, Toland," his mother answered; "I don't want to have to tell you again. They're in the right-hand pigeon-hole of the desk in the hall. And remember to be very careful as you approach the bush. If you frighten the parent birds, they may desert the eggs and never come back again. Oh, yes, Professor Halliway, I quite agree with you on that matter. Municipal— What is it, Emily?" She interrupted herself this time, addressing the maid who had appeared in the doorway.

"Mrs. Tilden, Mrs. Warburton. She said not to come to the phone, but just to say whether you could have that suffrage meeting here a week from Tuesday."

"Yes, Emily. Tell Mrs. Tilden Tuesday will be all right," Mrs. Warburton answered.

"This is always such a gay house on Saturdays," Professor Halliway commented. "My wife and I often speak of it."

"Yes," Phoebe agreed, "we always look forward to Saturdays. It's a kind of rallying day for the family—my brother and his wife, their children, and my father and mother generally appear in the course of the afternoon. And then all the Piety Corner people are such tennis fans that our court makes the place a kind of center for the whole neighborhood. We have a shower in the barn, but it isn't enough. People are taking baths in the house all the after-

noon long. My husband believes so much in exercise that he starts the tennis just as soon as he can in the spring and keeps it up as late as possible in the fall. It makes the summer so much longer. We play on Thanksgiving Day often. I really think we have more outdoor life than any family in Maywood."

"Yes, I think you do, Mrs. Warburton," Professor Halliway said. "And do you mean to tell me the baby sleeps in all this rumpus?"

"Perfectly!" Phoebe answered. "But Micah is a marvel for sleeping. No wonder! The poor lamb—— He's been brought up in a household with, as I always say, tennis at his head and a dance at his feet."

"When I think of the absolute quiet our children had——" Professor Halliway murmured.

Professor Halliway was one of Phoebe's neighbors. Although he had not lived long there, he was very popular in Maywood. He came from the West, and he seemed to express in his personality all the briskness and enterprise that Eastern people have grown to believe are inevitable Western characteristics. Perhaps what Maywood liked best about him was that though he possessed every claim to being considered a highbrow—he was the author of "*The Democratic Ideal*"—he never pressed any of those claims. He was a perfect specimen of one Western

type—long, lean, gangling. The deep blue of his eyes set refreshing glints of color in his sleek, close-cropped head. A certain amusing irregularity of contour added a whimsical expression, equally attractive. The letter R birred pleasantly through his speech.

"You are very lucky to have space enough to permit so much hospitality," he added thoughtfully. "It is a beautiful place and a beautiful house. Just how old is it?"

"About two hundred years. It's one of the three oldest houses in town. It belonged for years to an old Maywood family by the name of Durland. They left America for England about twenty-five years ago."

"Durland! Durland!" the professor repeated with a note of interrogation.

"Eileen Durland married the Duke of St. Seaverns," Phoebe answered his unconscious question. "You must have heard of our one Maywood celebrity. Maywood wouldn't be on the map if it weren't for Eileen Durland. I was a little girl when the Durlands left Maywood and went to London, and I don't remember them at all; but I've always heard people talk about them. Mrs. Durland was a beautiful woman—a blonde of a very ethereal, almost an angelic type. Mr. Durland was blond too and there were eight children—five boys and three girls—all

blonds. They said it was as if the house was filled with angels. Eileen, the oldest girl, was a great beauty. Mr. Durland had very influential connections in England. They say nobody since Lily Langtry has ever made such a sensation in London society as Eileen Durland. After they left, this house remained vacant for years and years. All during my childhood it was unoccupied. You see, for a long time Maywood didn't develop in this district. Everybody was going out Murray Corner way. The house was beginning to get a little tumble-down when Tug and I first looked at it. But we fell in love with it at once."

"It's a wonder," Professor Halliway commented. "Sometimes I think it takes us Westerners really to appreciate a place like this."

The room in which they sat extended down one whole side of the house. It was a big room, nobly proportioned in the colonial way. The white-painted woodwork—the doors, the mantel, the little closets above it—and the metalwork—knobs, latches, hinges—were exactly what the Colonial taste had chosen. And much exceptionally fine old furniture bore out the Colonial atmosphere. But in effect the house was modern. A certain cleanly clutter gave it all the earmarks of a real living-room. A tea-wagon, heaped with sandwiches and cookies, steamed in one corner. The big, old-fashioned center table

was loaded with books, magazines, and incongruous things: "Fauna and Flora of New England," "The Blue Fairy-Book," "The Old-Fashioned Girl," the *Youth's Companion*, the *St. Nicholas*, a bag of marbles, an open paint-box, a baseball mask. A file of dolls, sitting in tiny chairs on the hearth, mutely contemplated the painted scene of a toy theater. On a small table at Phoebe's right, a half-completed smock of pink linen overflowed a capacious work-basket.

"That stairway is such a beauty, too," the professor murmured. "I am struck afresh with it every time I come into the house."

The wide living-room door opened into a wide hall papered in an old-fashioned landscape paper. The stairway, which filled the center, widened gradually as it approached the lower floor. It was guarded on both sides by a balustrade made with carved white-painted banisters and a mahogany hand-rail which, dropping at a beautiful slant, finally coiled at the newel-post into spirals, exquisitely carved.

"I'm glad you like the house," Phoebe said enthusiastically. "I adore it more and more every year of my life. We bought it for a song. And for a long time we were afraid that the neighborhood would gradually deteriorate, and some time for the children's sake we'd have to give it up. Then sud-

denly, to our great joy, Piety Corner began to boom."

"Piety Corner!" Professor Halliway repeated. "I'd forgotten that they used to call it that. Isn't it amusing? And so like Puritanical New England! How did they get that name?"

"There used to be churches on the other three corners," Phoebe explained. "Two were only temporary ones; they were taken down later. The other burned to the ground one night, and the congregation voted to follow the line of growth out Murray Corner way. It was very exciting when people first started to build here. Houses began to go up by twos and threes. Every night after Tug got home, we used to make the rounds of the streets to see how the buildings were progressing. They were all pretty houses, as you see, but comparatively inexpensive. And the first thing Tug and I knew, we were surrounded by a young married community. Every house seemed to have a bridal couple in it. Then the babies began to come. It's been such fun watching the families grow up round us."

"Yes," the professor agreed, "that must have been very interesting. It's rather a striking chance for sociological investigation. And again you are fortunate in that, no matter how much the neighborhood grows, you are protected—so far as space is concerned."

"Yes, we are lucky in that. We have lots of land at the back. At the other side, our property runs to the corner. I've always been worried for fear somebody would build on the lot next door, and so Tug bought it this year for my birthday. I'm going to have an old-fashioned garden on it—loads and *loads* of flowers—in great masses of color. And then, gradually, I'm going to get a sundial, a bird's bath, some of those beautiful garden seats in carved Italian marble, and a fountain perhaps. Won't it be lovely?"

"Very. There used to be an old house there, didn't there?"

"Yes. That burned when the church burned."

"What are you going to do with the old barn?" the professor inquired after a contemplative interval.

"If we can't sell it, we'll take it down."

"What a pity!" Professor Halliway commented. "It's a splendid specimen of Colonial barn-architecture—so ample and well-proportioned. It's almost as good as the day it was finished—those big beams are so interesting too and the wooden nails. Did you know that some of the shingles were hewn out with an adze?"

"No, I didn't know that," Phoebe answered. "But I do think it's nice—the lines are so long and low. I'm really sorry to have it go, but of course we have no use for it. It will take so much space

from my garden and we don't need it—we have a barn of our own."

The noise outside had not abated. Excited cries from a tennis crisis filtered through the hall. Inside the confusion had increased. Upstairs, male voices shouted from the bathroom windows encouraging or derisive comment on umpire decisions. Toland—a stocky, wild-haired little lad, all teeth and freckles—came sliding down the banisters and departed from the house with the full boy-complement of unnecessary clatter. The screen door opened and shut suddenly.

"Say, Mrs. Warburton," a man's voice called from the hall, "I'm in a mackintosh—half dressed, so I won't come in. But can I borrow some dress studs off Tug? The baby's asleep in our room—the first time in hours after this teething spell—and we don't either of us dare to go in for fear of waking her up. We're in an awful rush to catch that four-twenty-seven."

"Help yourself, Mr. Dabney," Phoebe answered. "You know Tug's room. The little leather box on his bureau."

The dialogue between the fluting treble and the unseen presences had gradually grown louder. "Mother! mother!" the treble voice called suddenly, coming nearer on a swift patter of footsteps. "Dotty and I want to play mud-pies, and Annie

won't give me any dishes." A little girl appeared in the doorway.

At first appearance Phoebe-Girl was all huge black-star eyes, agreeably tangled in eyelashes. But gradually there disentangled themselves from their candid lucence the red of her brilliant cheeks and lips, the white sparkle of her engaging smile.

"What do you do with all the dishes I give you, Phoebe-Girl?" her mother demanded. Phoebe's voice was stern but in spite of herself, her expression softened to the vision.

"Some of them breaked," the fluting treble explained categorically. "And Berfa-Lizabuff taked all the perserve glasses and Gordon stole a whole lot. And we made lots of pies and now we want to make some gingy-bread."

"Will you excuse me just a minute, Professor Halliway?" Phoebe asked.

"Certainly," Professor Halliway answered.

With her characteristic vigor of action, Phoebe swung swiftly through the doorway.

"Well, I'll see——" Phoebe's voice trailed off into silence with her retreating footsteps.

Left alone, the professor walked from one window to the other of the big room. At the side, the decorative white wooden fence which surrounded the Warburton place was not far from the house. Beyond—an indiscriminate scramble of weeds,

broken by the gray hulk of the old barn—was the recently purchased lot. Beyond the lot lay flat marsh country, green with a piercing spring greenness. In front stretched a well-kept lawn sprinkled with tree and bush. The street passed this, passed the new lot, cut into the heart of the marsh, came out on the other side and disappeared in a big huddle of faded, dull-colored houses. At the back were marshes again. But these drew into cultivated patches that, rising higher and higher on the slopes of Mount Fairview, looked like a tilted checkerboard; colored in all the shades of young vegetable growths.

"It must be very interesting—I mean there must come a definite psychological effect from living in a house like this," Professor Halliway observed on the return of his hostess—"a house with a history and traditions."

"Yes,"—Phoebe's comprehension was instant—"there is. I have never shaken off my impression that the Durland spirit lingers here. The Durlands were such fine people; they were all mixed up with the early history of the town, you know. And then their family life was beautiful—they were so lovely to everybody. Oh yes, they've left an atmosphere in the house. I feel it sometimes almost as a presence."

"Yes," Professor Halliway mused half to him-

self, "it would be a rather interesting idea—a little fanciful, perhaps—to work up into an essay. The theme that it is every man's duty to leave the spirit of civic righteousness in his home both as an inspiration and an urge to the next generation. But I've really come here this afternoon with a very definite purpose, Mrs. Warburton," he changed the subject suddenly. "I want to talk over something with you and your husband. I'm sorry Mr. Warburton is late today. It's about the marsh section and the marsh children."

"Oh yes," Phoebe said comprehendingly, "I know exactly what you are going to say. It is a great problem, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," Professor Halliway asserted with emphasis. "My wife feels it even more strongly than I do. It's only the fact that she's been such an invalid this winter that has kept her from coping with the situation before."

"I suppose," Phoebe suggested, "that she's only going through what I've been through with Toland and am now going through with Bertha-Elizabeth."

"Bertha-Elizabeth?" the professor echoed. "I thought she never did anything but stay in the house and read?"

"She always has been a great reader," Phoebe said, and said it—in spite of herself—with pride. "But although she's never been exactly *ill*, she's

always been *frail*. I've always worried about her." That question that Phoebe ever asked of Fate filled her eyes for an instant with its wistful poignancy. "We never could seem to make her keep out enough in the open air. But this spring she's so much more vigorous and strong! I don't know what's done it. Lately, however, she's developed the greatest friendship for Cely Connors, who lives down in the marsh section. Cely seems to be a nice enough little girl, but naturally I'd much rather have Bertha-Elizabeth play with children nearer home—the little Drew children, for instance, who've just come back from France. They've such lovely manners and speak such delicious French. And then besides she's always running down to the marsh section to play at Cely's house. I never know what associations she may get there, of course."

"Well, they won't be good ones," the professor announced decisively, "you may be sure of that. Perry came home yesterday with his nose bleeding and Hammond with his eyes blackened where they got into a fight. Dick is hand-in-glove with that Tom Furey—a great big bruiser of a boy. I really can't understand it in Dick—he's rather the student type. We can't seem to keep our boys away from the marsh section or the marsh boys away from here. Yet they always fight. And it isn't because we haven't tried to be friendly. I've often offered

the marsh boys work about our place, but they always refuse it."

"Yes, I know exactly what you mean. I never saw anything like Bertha-Elizabeth's passion for Cely Connors. Recently I've got Toland interested in birds—he's spending much of his time hunting them with opera glasses. But before I thought of that, he simply lived in the marsh section. Oh, here's mother!"

Phoebe ran to the door and kissed the tall, spare, white-haired woman who appeared there. "Father coming later, mother?" she asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Martin answered.

Mrs. Martin and Professor Halliway shook hands.

"We're talking about the marsh section and the marsh children, mother," Phoebe explained.

"Yes, and I would very much like to have Mrs. Martin hear my plan," the professor offered cordially.

Mrs. Martin sat down in one of the big winged chairs. She was as tall and slender as Phoebe, but with none of Phoebe's muscular vitality. All the colorings of youth had faded from her face, but the fine pencilings of character had taken their place—pencilings that her wavy white hair softened. It was obvious the instant she faced the professor that her personality was shy and retiring; and, the moment

she began to speak, that her speech was slow and inarticulate. But it was also obvious after she entered the room that she was there. And she continued to be there with a deeper and finer sense of spiritual ponderability every instant.

"The thing for us to do," Professor Halliway began, "is to stop trying to cope with the marsh children, but to work out a plan that will eliminate the marsh section. No one of us going at it alone could accomplish anything, but a group of us working together could get away with it absolutely. My idea is to form a company that shall buy up the marsh section, make a residential district of it with the kind of restriction that would keep out any but desirable people. Frankly, Mrs. Warburton, I look to your husband to provide the business brains for this proposition—to put it on a paying basis. I mean that with Mr. Warburton, his father, your father, your brother and a few others interested in it, we could certainly swing it. They'd probably own the greatest interest in the company. The rest of us could invest according to our means. From the business point of view, it seems to me a good proposition. I don't see how we could lose money on it, and we might make a lot. But the main thing is to get rid of unpleasant neighbors and free ourselves for good of a situation that threatens the welfare of our children."

"I think it's a perfectly *gorgeous* idea," Phoebe burst out enthusiastically. "It would be the very best thing that could possibly happen to Maywood. Don't you think so, mother?"

"Well, I don't know exactly," Mrs. Martin answered slowly. "It's a thing I'd have to think about before I gave an opinion."

"That's the thing for all of us to do," Professor Halliway said, rising, "think it over. No—no tea, thank you, Mrs. Warburton," as Phoebe made a movement towards the tea-table. "I must go now. I've talked this matter over but with one person—Mrs. Peake Tilden. She said if I could get your co-operation, Mrs. Warburton, the thing was done. I'll be over to see Mr. Warburton some time next week." He shook hands with both ladies.

"Oh, I'm so glad you came early this afternoon, mother," Phoebe said after the professor had disappeared. "All this talk about the marsh section is funny, for I'm going down there right away. I didn't want to say anything about it before Professor Halliway, but Miss Humphrey—Bertha-Elizabeth's teacher—stopped in for a few minutes this morning, and what do you think Bertha-Elizabeth's been doing? Playing truant right along every week for months. Miss Humphrey said of course it never occurred to her to suspect until she found from Miss Ward that Cely Connors was always absent on the

same day. She said of course Cely was to blame; she was going right down to see Mrs. Connors about it. She said she'd stop in here on her way back and tell me the result of her talk. She hasn't come yet—I don't know why. I've made up my mind that the best thing I could do was to have a perfectly frank talk with Mrs. Connors myself and tell her that I want her to send Bertha-Elizabeth home every time she goes down to the marsh section. Of course I don't want Mrs. Connors to realize that it's Cely who's put Bertha-Elizabeth up to this playing-hookey business, and I *do* want to be as tactful and kind as possible. But I'd like you to be with me—you're such a wizard with people. You don't mind going?"

"No," Mrs. Martin said with an unexpected energy of assent. "I'd like to go."

The screen door opened and shut vigorously. "Where are you, Phoebe?" a man's voice called from the hall.

"In the living-room," Phoebe answered.

"Does Tug always call for you the first thing when he comes into the house?" Mrs. Martin inquired, as Mr. Warburton stopped to applaud the tennis players.

"The instant he opens the door," Phoebe answered. Her face suffused for an instant, not with a blush but with an expression that was half tender-

ness, half amusement. "I've never told him how much I love it for fear he'd get conscious and stop it. He always acts as though he was afraid somebody had stolen me in his absence. Yes, Tug," she addressed the man who appeared in the doorway —a curly-headed gentleman whose moon-glasses, however much they exaggerated the size of his blue eyes, could not exaggerate their kindness. "I am still here. There have been three attempts to abduct me since morning, but I have foiled them all. You took a great risk in marrying a second Helen of Troy."

"I'm often struck with that thought myself," Tug remarked cheerfully, kissing his wife. "Where are the children?"

"Baby is asleep. Toland is watching the robins in the lilac bush with my opera glasses. Phoebe-Girl is playing mud-pies in the barn. Bertha-Elizabeth has gone on her weekly spree with Cely Connors."

"Where's Edward? Running away as usual?"

"No, he's with the twins."

"Humph!" Tug commented sarcastically. "He's safe in that gentle atmosphere."

"Oh, Tug, Professor Halliway has just been here with a most *wonderful* scheme—a business proposition—that he wants you to——"

"Can't bother with it now," Tug cut in decisively.

"And then any business scheme a professor puts up interests me darn little. Besides Ern's coming up in a minute and I'm going to lick the wadding out of him. He said Sylvia'd be along later. I've got to change." He disappeared upwards.

"Tell Ernie I'll come back here before he goes," Mrs. Martin adjured the fleeting figure.

"Well, I might as well get that Connors call out of my system," Phoebe decided. "Wait until I get my things on, mother. I'll be ready in a jiff."

Phoebe flew up the stairway—she had never walked upstairs in her life—ran through the hall. When she returned, she had slipped a long navy-blue taffeta coat over her navy-blue gown, an untrimmed, three-cornered, black straw hat on her glinting rippy hair. Long black gloves, slim black shoes, a crisp black veil—there was an air, inalienable to her of freshness and smartness.

"Bertha-Elizabeth has looked so rosy lately I can't tell you how happy it's made me. I don't know whether you've ever guessed it, mother—" Phoebe paused, and that poignant question, which even at her gayest moment pierced the assured happiness of her look, made her eyes dilate an instant.

"Yes, I've guessed it," her mother put in quietly.

"I've always been afraid," Phoebe confessed, "that I'd lose Bertha-Elizabeth—always—always—until the last six months. She's been so frail-

looking! But I never told anybody—not even Tug. Now I don't even think of it. She's got such a good color."

"Yes, your father has spoken of it again and again—and she's begun to thicken up."

"Oh yes, she's gaining. It's curious, I never worry about the other children. Toland might be made of iron and Phoebe-Girl of stone—they're so strong. Edward's like a steel rod. As for Micah—he's a perfect butter-ball."

"Yes, they've got wonderful constitutions," her mother said proudly. "They get that from my family."

"Of course, Mother Warburton says they get it from hers," Phoebe remarked mischievously. "But I don't care where they get it—as long as they've got it."

"I think Professor Halliway is an exceedingly interesting man, mother." It was Phoebe who changed the subject. "There's something so finely democratic about him. His lecture in the Town Hall—'The Civic Consciousness'—was one of the most splendid things I ever listened to. This scheme of his sounds pretty good to me."

"I've been wondering about that," Mrs. Martin said. "What will all those people in the marsh section do if you buy their houses over their heads?"

"Do without, I suppose," Phoebe replied lightly.

"If they can't get other houses in Maywood, perhaps they'll go to Rosedale. That's the nearest town."

"Well, maybe the Rosedale people won't want to have them," Mrs. Martin suggested.

"That's Rosedale's problem, not ours," Phoebe decided trenchantly. "It's only up to us to decide the problem as it affects Maywood."

"But somehow," her mother promulgated slowly, "it doesn't seem quite fair to drive people out of your town into the next—especially if they are not what Professor Halliway calls 'desirable people.' For if that town doesn't like them, they can send them on to the next town, and so on. That would keep them on the move—sort of—all the time."

"Yes," Phoebe agreed. "I suppose it would. Still, what else can we do? Our duty is to our own community as we see it."

Mrs. Martin's eyes wandered over the pool-dotted marshes that were like green velvet embroidered in silver, and up to the cloudless June sky that was like a bowl of the most brittle and transparent glass, stained at one point by the vague smear of the crescent moon. "I feel as though I were in the real country," she said. "Land, I can't remember when I walked over this road last. I guess it was when I used to be traipsing down to the marsh section all the time, myself, first for you and then for Ernest."

"Did I used to run away and play with the marsh children?" Phoebe asked, obviously surprised.

"My *Lord*, yes!" her mother answered. "Everybody down there knew you. Perfect strangers to me were always bringing you back."

"Well, I guess Bertha-Elizabeth comes rightly by this tendency," Phoebe commented with a gleam of appreciation.

"Who is this Mrs. Connors?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"I don't know," Phoebe answered indifferently. "I don't think I've ever seen her. She's got several children—that's all I know about her."

"It's queer about women," Mrs. Martin said, after an interval of thoughtful silence. "I declare sometimes I don't know what to make of them. But then when I think how experience keeps changing you! You have one opinion about a thing at one spell in your life and another opinion about the same thing later. And you're just as likely as not to go back to the first opinion again. And yet you're perfectly honest all the time. Take motherhood—it's the queerest about that. All the novels and all the poetry tell us that it ennobles women. And they're right in a way. I guess it would be a poor kind of woman who didn't say she was a better woman for having a family. But then see the other things motherhood does. It seems to me, as I look back

upon my life, that I've never known a woman who wasn't a snob about her children. I was. It isn't because women are unkind or cruel; it's only because there's something inside driving us to do the best we can for our children and give them everything we never had ourselves. And above all we want them to grow up healthy and smart and good. That makes us do the cruelest things. Do you remember Hetty Browne, Phoebe?"

For an instant Phoebe's radiant smile brought a flare of light into her smoky-gray eyes. "Perfectly," she answered, "a lil' nig with *such* bright eyes and kinky curls. I used to play with her at primary school. I remember she always was so neat."

"Neater than *wax!*!" Mrs. Martin agreed. "Well, you brought her home from school two or three times. And you two used to play together so pretty and good and happy. Then I noticed that the other children in the neighborhood were beginning to stop coming into the yard. And I was afraid it would hurt you. And so one day I sent little Hetty home, and I told her she must never come to the house again. Phoebe, I can remember her face to this day and the look of her little figure as she walked away. It haunted me for a long time."

Phoebe's eyes misted with the sympathy that was as instant as her mirth. "Poor little Hetty!" she exclaimed. "That makes me feel awfully bad.

But I don't see that you could have done anything different."

"Well, I don't, either," Mrs. Martin agreed. "And yet it wasn't Christian, I guess. I think I'd try to find another way now, though I don't exactly know what."

They were close upon the marsh section now—not a very big area at most, but rather too crowded with narrow streets which in turn were altogether too crowded with narrow houses. The marsh section was like a little island of high, dry land, and around it the marsh stretched like a sea. The road that led out of it ran past the railroad station to Rosedale. Within the marsh section itself, jerry-built apartment houses of the present day shouldered substantial family mansions of an older generation. Tenement houses of the intermediate period filled in the architectural hiatus. The place teemed with spring activity. Little boys played marbles in the streets; big boys, baseball in the empty lots. Little girls engaged in hopscotch on the sidewalks; big girls in jackstones in the doorways. Corner groups of the one sex parted to permit bisection by arm-in-arm groups of the other. The piazzas of the gone-to-seed mansions, the meager porches of the tenement houses were filled with women who read or sewed; offered or received gossip; admonished the older children; or nursed the younger ones.

The two women did not speak for a while.

"It's number 10 Acorn Street," Phoebe stated absently. "Here's Chestnut—it's right along here somewhere." Then as though she were answering some unexpressed criticisms, she poured out defense. "You don't know how hard it is for us at Piety Corner, mother. Of course being nearer the marsh section than any other part of Maywood, we have to bear the brunt of all the trouble. Those marsh boys are divided into gangs, and they're really tough. Professor Halliway was telling me what a terrible time his boys are having. And then the marsh children rob our orchards, steal our flowers, and break our windows—it's perfectly dreadful the things they do. I should think they'd stay at home."

"Well, there isn't much space for them to stay in," Mrs. Martin commented mildly.

"Oh, here's Acorn Street," Phoebe exclaimed, unheeding.

They crossed the main street, turned into a side street, and presently entered a yard where sat a little low, two-storied house. Close to the piazza and along three sides of the fence ran flower plots in full leaf; but all else was thick, soft grass. Blossoming lilac bushes, white and purple, deluged the air with fragrance. An old boat filled with earth showed a flutter of nasturtium shoots. A woman

arose from a rocking-chair on the porch as they turned in at the gate.

"Mrs. Connors?" Phoebe asked politely.

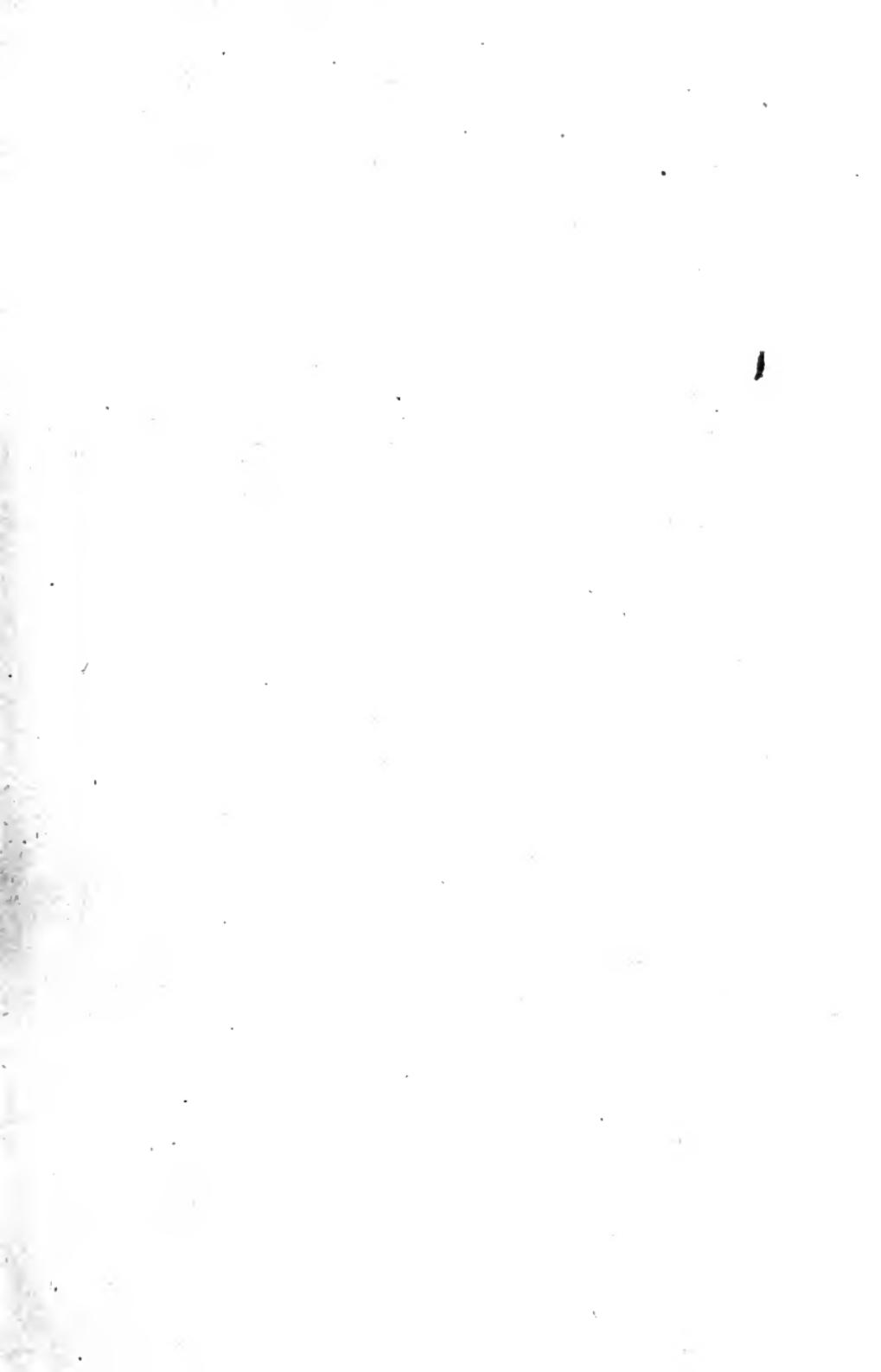
"Yes," the woman answered. Her full hearty tones blurred with a faint suggestion of brogue. Her wide eyes were limpid with inquiry.

"I am Mrs. Warburton," Phoebe explained—"Bertha-Elizabeth's mother, and this is my mother, Mrs. Martin."

Mrs. Connors' face lighted with a glow of friendliness as instant as Phoebe's own.

It was a round, strong healthily-colored face, surmounting a round, strong full-bosomed figure. The abundance and bushiness of her jet-black hair, the brunette stain under her satiny bloom gave her almost a tropical appearance. But her eyes were the color of Erin; and all Erin's hospitality gleamed in her trusting smile. "It's glad I am to see the two of you," she declared heartily. "Come right in."

She led the way through the little front hall into the little front room. It was small and neat, with wallpaper of a plain bright red and furniture of a highly varnished oak. Some books had overflowed from the modest bookcase onto the center table, had joined there a magazine or two, a cribbage board, a basket of darning, a pitcher of lilacs. On the mantel were some vases of an innocuous shape and color and on the wall a few pictures equally harmless. Be-





"Now, Mrs. Warburton! Don't you be making any apologies"

tween the windows, however, hung what made a focus of beauty—a print, beautifully colored and exquisitely framed, of Raphael's Madonna of the Chair.

"Is Bertha-Elizabeth here this afternoon, Mrs. Connors?" Phoebe asked.

"Yes, she and Cely are out in the kitchen—cooking," Mrs. Connors answered.

"Cooking!" Phoebe echoed in surprise. And then, as though deliberately ignoring this in order to get to more important business, "I've come here this afternoon about this matter of their playing truant," she plunged straight into the heart of it.

"Now, now, now! Mrs. Warburton!" Mrs. Connors exclaimed heartily, "don't you be making any apologies, because I've had too many children not to understand that. I'm glad, though, you came to me before you saw Bertha-Elizabeth, because being the young mother you are, you'll be thinking it's more serious than it is." She flashed a smile of understanding to Mrs. Martin which that lady answered in kind. "I called the two children in, the moment Miss Humphrey left, and questioned them, and Bertha-Elizabeth came right straight out with it. She said that she made Cely play truant, so's they might work in their rhubarb garden. She was afraid to go home at first, and I told her I'd go with her and make it all right with you. Sure!"

she exclaimed, and all Ireland vibrated softly in her coaxing voice, "and you wouldn't be punishing the child for a little thing like that now, would you?"

Phoebe did not answer that question for a moment. But her face changed with the speed and completeness of a moving-picture film. Surprise, mystification, anger, mortification made eloquent progress across it. Then suddenly she veiled it with a deliberate inscrutability. "Certainly not," she said. She spoke graciously, even smilingly. "And it is very kind of you not to mind. But I don't understand about this rhubarb garden."

"Well, now that's a long story," Mrs. Connors answered, and her voice still coaxed. "Last fall, Cely wasn't very well—with a little cough that kept on and on. Himself was quite worried about her; and so I took her out of school and sent her to her Grandmother Connors in Charlestown for a rest and a change-like. Her grandma was putting up rhubarb, and Cely helped her. This spring she and Bertha-Elizabeth found some rhubarb growing in the yard of that old empty Brentwood house on Walnut Street. Cely told Bertha-Elizabeth that she knew how to make rhubarb preserve. And Bertha-Elizabeth told Cely if she'd play truant and help take care of the garden, she'd bring some preserve jars from the house and buy sugar out of her spending-money, so's they could put it up. I never had a

suspicion what was going on until Miss Humphrey came this morning."

"I see," Phoebe said blankly. She looked dazed for an instant. Then she resumed her inscrutability.

"Bertha-Elizabeth loves to cook—I never saw anything like the knack of the child. Every Saturday in the winter, I let the two of them make cake or cookies or pies. I feel very much obligated to you, Mrs. Warburton," Mrs. Connors had the effect now of intention, as deliberate as Phoebe's, of changing the subject, "for letting Bertha-Elizabeth lend Cely so many books. Cely loves to read, but I can't afford to buy her all the books she wants, and the library's such a long way off for a little girl. I buy her one of Louisa Alcott's books every Christmas and every birthday, and that's about all I can afford. Bertha-Elizabeth's books are beautiful. I make Cely take good care of them—she covers every one of them before she reads a word."

"Oh, she needn't do that," Phoebe protested mechanically. "Bertha-Elizabeth's Alcott books are the ones I had when I was a little girl."

"Yes, I read the name and date in them," Mrs. Connors said. "I read all those Alcott books when I was about Cely's age, and mind you, Mrs. Warburton—now don't it seem queer the way things come about?—I read those books in the very house in which you're living now. Eileen Durland—the one

that's the Duchess—used to play with me when we were children. Oh, what friends we were! Manny's the day I've spent at her house and manny's the day she's spent at mine. Her mother was such a beautiful fine woman. My mother—Heaven rest her!—used to say she looked like a saint. My mother taught Eileen how to cook, and she was a fine little cook, too. Eileen's mother taught me to love reading. Eileen sent me that picture when I was married—all the way from London." She pointed to the Raphael Madonna. "And last year when my brother Tim was over there—he's a gunner's mate on the *Marysville*—he dropped her a postal-card saying he was in London. She invited him down to her house—an elegant grand big castle it was—and give him the best time Tim ever had, driving all day in an automobile."

"That doesn't surprise me," Phoebe declared, "I've always heard such lovely things about the Durland family. You must come and call on me soon, Mrs. Connors, and see the house again." Phoebe's intention was obviously hospitable but still her tone was a little mechanical. And she maintained her bright inscrutability.

"I'll be pleased," Mrs. Connors said. "Cely's told me how fine you've made it. I was that glad when you bought it and the FOR SALE sign came down I could have cried. It used to give me

a queer feeling—sad-like—when I went past it. I'm always so happy in my mind when Cely's at your house, Mrs. Warburton, but I don't like her to be with manny of those Piety Corner children. They're a bad lot—some of them. Those two older Halliway boys now—not the young one—every time they come down here they do be making trouble—that's the blessed truth. Mrs. Connolly's boy came home the other day all bloody where he'd been fighting the two of them. I like Dick Halliway. Tom Furey says he's a good fine boy. But the rest of those Piety Corner boys! They rob our fruit trees—they tromp on our flower beds, and they break our windows. And when they're getting junk, it do be God's truth, they steal everything that isn't nailed down. Himself says they'd take the railroad track itself if they could rip it up."

Definitely Phoebe dropped her look of a bright inscrutability for one of a dazed perplexity.

"Not that all boys aren't bad sometimes—the best of them," Mrs. Connors declared charitably. "But we was discussing it just the other day, some of my neighbors, and there was some talk of forming a committee to go up and see the parents of the boys that make so much trouble. And then we said, 'Lord love us, think of what our own boys do be doing all the time!' Now, Mrs. Warburton, wouldn't the two of you be having a cup of tea

with me? I put the teapot on the stove just the moment before you came."

"I would like it very much," Mrs. Martin answered for them both. Phoebe seemed to find it difficult to emerge from her daze.

Mrs. Connors bustled out of the room and hustled back, bearing in installments crackers, jam, a little tea-set of a thin red and gold Japanese china. The teapot, however, was of a black shiny crockery.

"How delicious this is!" Mrs. Martin approved, tasting without milk the steaming, pale-gold fluid. "Tea always goes to the right spot, doesn't it?"

"There's nothing like it," Mrs. Connors averred. "And some of those Piety Corner people," she reverted to her grievance, "seems to have very queer ideas, indeed. I don't mean old Maywood families like yours, Mrs. Warburton, and Mrs. Martin, and ours—I mean those new people. They look down on us that has lived here in Maywood ever since we were born, as though we was the dirt under their feet. Sometimes we wish we could move them all out of here to Rosedale—only that isn't our idea of a fair way to act. We're very proud of Maywood down here in the marsh section, and we hate to see those kind of people coming into it. Down here, we think everybody is as good as everybody else, and those ideas don't make anny hit with us. Those people seem to think our children are good enough for

some things—and not for others. When they've got anny dirty work to do, they're always after us."

"I know exactly what you mean," Mrs. Martin announced sympathetically. "Once when Phoebe was a little girl, some people by the name of Emery took the big Chandler place for a while. They had everything money could buy—horses and carriages, servants in livery. Their little daughter Emmeline was just Phoebe's age. One day they invited Phoebe to come over and spend the day with Emmeline. Of course I let her go, but when I asked Emmeline to come over and spend the day with Phoebe they wouldn't let her come. When I told Mr. Martin, he got as *mad*—he said Phoebe wasn't to go there again on any account. But it seems that little Emmeline had taken a great fancy to Phoebe, and begged so often to have her over there that Mr. Emery actually took the matter up with Mr. Martin on the train. Mr. Martin said Phoebe could go over to see Emmeline as soon as Emmeline had been over to see her. 'But it's our rule never to let Emmeline go to other people's houses,' Mr. Emery said. 'She's the only little girl we've got.' 'Well, Phoebe's the only little girl *we've* got!' said Mr. Martin. 'And I'm not inclined to take any more risks with my child than you are with yours.' They never let Emmeline come, and Phoebe never went over there."

"Well, the queer creatures that some people do be!" Mrs. Connors commented. "Have some more tea, Mrs. Warburton."

When, after a protracted struggle with some legal-looking documents, Tug Warburton started for bed that night, he discovered his wife sitting at the head of the stairway in the moonlight that poured through the hall window.

"Stop where you are!" she commanded as his foot touched the lower step. "You're not coming nearer until you've heard a confession I've got to make."

Phoebe's long pale-blue kimona, wrapped tight about her body, minimized her matronly fullness, brought out lost suggestions of her girlish slimness. Her loose hair, tied with a blue ribbon and falling in feathery pale-amber torrents onto her shoulders, subtracted from the roundness of her face, revived a lost pointedness of contour. Pale-blue bed shoes peeked from under her kimona. Her attitude was that of a naughty child who expects to be disciplined.

Tug's face gloomed for an instant; then gleamed as he ensconced himself comfortably on the lower stair. "Shoot, wife of my bosom!" he commanded. "Put me out of my misery."

"Do you realize, Toland Warburton," Phoebe went on, "that your wife is the queen of snobs?"

"I certainly don't," Tug asserted. "Now that you ask me, I'll admit that it has never even occurred to me. Still," he added as one recognizing a great cosmic truth, "all women are more or less, aren't they?"

"Yes," Phoebe said sorrowfully. "Mother says so, and I guess she's right. They don't mean to be—they don't know it often; they can't seem to help it. I didn't know I was until today."

"What revealed you to yourself, O spouse of my soul?" Tug continued in extravagant apostrophe. He smiled genially as one who humors mania for the moment.

"A lot of things," Phoebe admitted mournfully, "all coming at once. First Professor Halliway told me about a scheme that I thought was a perfect wonder. It was for all the Piety Corner men to get together, buy up the marsh section, turn out the people who are living there, and change it to a residential neighborhood with such restrictions that only what he called 'desirable' people could afford to live in it."

"Poppycock!" Tug exploded. He started to kick the newel post, but thought better of it. "And I must say I'm stuck on his nerve. Some of these year-and-a-half-old citizens of ours give me a fine big elegant pain. What does he know about the marsh section? I was born and brought up in May-

wood, and I like the marsh section fine. Why, when I nearly got T.B. that time when I was growing too fast, Mike Leahy saved my life teaching me to box in his barn. Mother thinks it was that punk three months we spent in Florida that cured me, but, believe me, it was Leahy chased the T.B. bugs out of my system."

"Well," Phoebe announced with a fresh accession of self-depreciation, "that's *just about as much* as I know about things. I thought it was a perfectly ripping scheme until I went down to the marsh section to call on Mrs. Connors."

"What Mrs. Connors?" Tug demanded. "O angel of my household!" he added with placating intent.

"Mrs. James Connors," Phoebe answered. "Do you know her husband? She spoke as though you did."

"Jim Connors! I should say *so*. Jim and I play hand-ball regularly at the gym. Jim's a great person. By the way, O fairy of my fireside, didn't your heart swell with a vague emotion when you entered the Connors' front yard?" Tug had the air of one turning the conversation to more cheerful channels.

"Not that I noticed," Phoebe replied, impatiently patient of interruption.

"O woman, woman! And yet you ask for the ballot! Don't you know, O apple of my eye, that

on that hallowed spot, Mike McCarthy trained for the fight with Big Jack Nolan that made him champion heavyweight of the world?"

"No, of course I didn't know it. Tug," Phoebe went on, ignoring further his attempt at lightness, "I might as well tell you now that Bertha-Elizabeth has been playing truant from school right along for *months* with Cely Connors."

"Good for Bertha-Elizabeth!" exclaimed Tug. "I didn't know it was in her."

"I'm sure I didn't," Phoebe declared. "Of course when Miss Humphrey told me about it, I took it for granted that it was Cely who was putting Bertha-Elizabeth up to it. But when I got down to Mrs. Connors' house I discovered that it was the other way about. Not that I *really* mind. Bertha-Elizabeth's been working all this time out-of-doors in a garden, and that's why she's got those rosy cheeks. I almost don't care *what* she does as long as she looks so well. Mrs. Connors has been teaching her how to cook, and she's simply crazy about it. It's a great mortification to me, Tug, when I reflect that for months I've been trying to think of some scheme that would take Bertha-Elizabeth out of her books, and that Mrs. Connors has succeeded where I failed. And then Mrs. Connors began telling me how bad the Piety Corner children act when they go down to the marsh section, and how they

hate to see them come. And that set me to thinking——” She paused.

“ Go on, O light of my life! ” Tug encouraged her.

“ Well, sometimes, Tug, I think ”—Phoebe’s voice sank to its lowest pitch of self-depreciation—“ that I’m the original bonehead. Talk about solid *ivory!* Solid *adamant* is soft in comparison with what substitutes for gray matter in my skull. For instance, I’m always wrong in everything I *think* I know. As far as I see I have only one good quality. If anybody shows me *where* I’m wrong—and they’d better use words of one syllable and spell everything in capital letters—I *can* see it. But I can never get it for myself. And I realize now that the reason for the bad feeling between these two sections is that they have nothing in common to bring them together and make them understand each other—to give them the same interest. And then I’ve been thinking what a narrow congested place the marsh section is with no parks for the children to play in, and I thought—Tug, you told me that I could do anything I wanted with the lot next door, didn’t you? ”

“ I certainly did, O lodestar of my existence! ” Tug declared. “ Raise hippopotami if you want—the marsh is handy.”

“ I don’t want,” Phoebe announced automatically. “ I guess,” she went on analyzingly, “ the trouble

with a lot of people—really fine people like Professor Halliway—is that they're democratic enough in *theory*, but they're snobs like the rest of the world in *practice*. We're all born snobs, and a big part of spiritual development seems to be a matter of outgrowing it. Mother said a beautiful thing today on the way home when we were talking it over. In fact, it was a lot of things she said which showed me that I had always been a snob without knowing it. She said, ‘The idea of thinking that any *one* little child could be any better than any *other* little child! ’ ”

Phoebe paused. She looked questioningly down into her husband's face. That face smiled cheeringly up at her. But she did not return the smile.

“ And so I thought,” Phoebe poured on, “ that instead of a garden, I'd turn the next lot into a playground. Mrs. Connors told me how her youngest son learned to play tennis when he was away this summer and how crazy he is about it but never gets a chance to play because there are no courts round that he can use. And I thought I'd put in a tennis court—and maybe two on my lot—for children only. And work up tournaments and offer cups and get the marsh section children in the habit of coming up here. And I'm not going to tear down that barn. I'm going to fit it up gradually, part of it as a sort of gymnasium for the little boys, with apparatus—

and things; and part of it as a sort of play-place for the little girls with a cook-stove—and things. I'd just love to teach the girls cooking, especially if Mrs. Connors would help me. I'm sure she would—she's an awfully fine woman. It seems that Mrs. Durland made this place a rendezvous for the children of both neighborhoods. That's why her children grew up so splendid." Again Phoebe paused. And again she met her husband's smile. This time her eyes were alight with a soft fire, a lucence akin to the moon-magic that was sifting in through the hall window.

"Professor Halliway said a wonderful thing today, Tug. He does have beautiful ideas. I can't quote it *exactly*—but I agree with it absolutely. When a house has been used for the finest purposes by one generation, it's sort of *up* to the next one to carry it along. Don't you think so, Tug? And do you approve of my plan?"

"I certainly do, O sun of my universe!" Tug agreed heartily. "And go as far as you like!" He smiled again, and this time his smile was reflected in the flood of happiness that surged to his wife's face.

CHAPTER III

SYLVIA'S SISSIES

IN some form or other, it was happening so often now, that Ernest Martin wondered why his wife did not get it. It was, he reflected, a part of the angel quality in Sylvia's kindness that she never suspected others of unkindness. But Ernest, who had watched the situation grow, was becoming more and more sensitive to it—the more as he did not yet see what he could do. Sylvia's condition was in his opinion still serious. It circumscribed all his conversation with her. At this moment, for instance, he wondered if he dared tell her what had just happened.

Coming into the train late, Ernest caught sight of his cousin Lora talking with Nella Todd. He started in their direction. Some people changing seats back of them held him an instant. It was then that he got it—from Lora, almost shouted to overcome the reverberation of the train shed. "Sylvia's sissies!" Lora said. "Well, I suppose that would be what some people would call them. But it seems to me they could find something better to

do than to criticize such a sweet woman as Sylvia."

Ernest retreated swiftly to the smoking-car without having greeted the ladies.

"Sylvia's sissies!" The phrase still rang in his ear. He gazed fixedly out at the landscape so that he would not have to talk; a landscape rapidly retreating from the express in sliding, gliding, spirals of speed; a landscape so familiar that he did not even see it.

"Sylvia's sissies!"

Ernest Martin was very proud of the boy twins that were Sylvia's contribution to their marriage. Husky babies—and blackly brunette—from the beginning, they had grown into sturdy dark-browed little lads, whose coloring contrasted amazingly with their mother's fairness. Mentally, he ran down the length of their short lives. Sylvia had taken care of them herself and she had given her whole time and energy to the job. It had drained and thinned her. It seemed to Ernest that he watched each instant of the gradual process by which the shimmering wild-rose color faded out of Sylvia's cheeks and reappeared in the substantial cherry bloom of her two boys. When, however, he remonstrated with her, she silenced him with her seemingly superstitious fear that it was impossible for twins to be equally healthy, that unless she watched them with the constant care of the scientist making a delicate and

hazardous experiment, one or the other was sure to develop weakness. Their babyhood was characterized by feedings of scientific frequency, punctuality and mathematical exactitude of duration, alternating with naps so carefully planned that the whole machinery of the house was subsidiarized to them. This period lapsed insensibly to another in which she supervised the twins' lives with some difference of care but none of degree. She walked to school with them in the morning, met them at noon, walked back with them in the afternoon, met them at night. At twilight she read to them stories, poems, history. Between times they played out of doors, but always under her eye. It was the same in vacation. At the seashore she always sat with them while they dug in the sand or paddled in shoal water. In the country she played with them all over the comfortable farm at which they boarded. Except when they were in school, the boys were practically not out of her sight.

The advantages of Sylvia's system were that the twins had remarkably good manners and that they were exceedingly intelligent. The disadvantages were self-evident—that they were still babies, though they were now seven years old. The advantages thus far outweighed the disadvantages—Ernest had to admit that. But next year the twins would enter grammar school. Ernest smiled wryly when he

thought of them at recess time, surrounded by gangs of boys whose chief joy in life was to spy out baby weakness and play on it. He had no doubt that the experience was just what they needed, and yet every ounce of paternal feeling winced at the thought of the violence of the process and their unpreparedness for it.

“Sylvia’s sissies!”

He reviewed the instances that had opened his eyes to the condition of affairs. Curiously enough, it was his mother, the most gentle and least trouble-making of women, who first scratched his consciousness in this matter.

“Ernie,” Mrs. Martin said, “sometimes I think Sylvia works too hard taking care of the children. I’m afraid she’s wearing herself out.”

“She’s doing that all right, mother,” Ernest responded promptly. “But it takes somebody with more influence over her than I to prevent it.”

“It isn’t right,” his mother affirmed decisively, and then a little more hesitatingly, “and in a way, Ernie, it isn’t good for the children. It’s better for them to be more self-dependent.”

There was no more talk on the subject then. But the phrase ‘It’s better for them to be more self-dependent,’ came back repeatedly, stayed a little, then disappeared. Later, his sister opened the subject.

"Say, Ern," Phoebe remarked with her characteristic directness and trenchancy, "you mustn't let Sylvia work so hard taking care of the children. It's really too much. She's beginning to show the effects. She's lost her color."

"I know she works too hard just as much as you do, Phoebe," the ordinarily tranquil Ernest replied with a suggestion of asperity. "But if you think I—or anybody else—can do anything with Sylvia when it's a question of the children, you don't know her—that's all."

"But, Ern!" Phoebe began with one of her eager exclamative rushes into words. Then she came to a stop so instant that it was as though some sudden thought had put a break on her speech. She went on more slowly. "It isn't that alone; it's bad for the children to be so over-supervised. It makes them dependent and keeps them babies; people are beginning to talk about it. Toland said the other day in school one of the boys asked them why they didn't wear dresses like girls."

Ernest made some general reply and immediately changed the subject. He could no more discuss his wife with his sister than with his mother. But that remark lingered longer than the first one; lingered with an unpleasant sense of rancor.

And then a few days later, another incident happened. Following the crowd to the smoking-car, he

joined a trio of his neighbors. As he slipped into a seat, Doane was just bringing a remark to conclusion.

"I know they're young devils. We're always paying for window glass they've broken playing ball. And the policeman stops regularly to complain of some outrage they've perpetrated—but at least they're not tied to their mother's apron strings like—" Feeling the movement at his side, Doane turned. At the sight of Ernest, his jaw dropped. "Where did you come from?" he asked stupidly.

"Boston," Ernest answered jocularly. "As usual. That's my place of business. Let me give you my card."

The other two men, with the effect of rushing into conversation, broke in with remarks in which politics mixed with baseball. The incident made little impression on Ernest at the time. It was not until the next day that he realized it had made any impression at all. Then it recurred to him, bringing a sense of mental discomfort. Suddenly with one of those strange psychological gleams that we call intuition, it flashed on him that they had been discussing his children. "Tied to their mother's apron strings!" That remark rankled, and rankled sorely.

And now "Sylvia's sissies"!

He must not let that go by. He must say something to Sylvia. At times before, he had remon-

strated on his own initiative with his wife. Once he had suggested mildly that the twins be permitted to go to school alone and again with a little more insistence that they be allowed to play with other children unchaperoned. Both times Sylvia had flown to arms. Her morbid horror of the dangers of injury from haphazard motor travel and of disease from haphazard social contact foamed up into an interval of great nervous excitement. Ernest dropped the question at once. But now, he saw plainly, he must reopen it.

The decision sent him speeding to the door of the car, the first one to alight when it pulled into the Maywood station. It hastened his pace along Main Street, but when he turned up Olympic Avenue his speed slackened. Other considerations began to pour into his mind. Since the birth of their little daughter, stillborn, three years before, Sylvia's condition had been serious. She had lived during the greater part of those three years in a black fog of physical weakness and mental morbidity. It seemed to Ernest that a few weeks before she had begun to emerge from this fog. And then suddenly this encouraging re-crudescence developed curious phases. It produced periods in which a strange, hectic physical brilliancy was accompanied by an even stranger, deep-sunk mental preoccupation. Ernest, who had acquired the habit of watching his wife stealthily, in

terror always of the melancholia which threatened, was harassed with dread. Did this mean rejuvenation or a reaction towards complete mental breakdown? It circumscribed—that dread—all his conversation with her. At this moment, for instance, he wondered if he dared risk telling her just what had happened.

"Father," Phoebe said, appearing in the Martin living-room that Saturday afternoon, "come out and take a walk with me. There's something I want to talk over with you."

Mr. Martin groaned with an ostentatious display of reluctance, but he arose immediately. "You mean you want to tell me of something you're going to do. You're in doubt whether you ought to do it; and you want me to back you up."

"Take your pipe along," Phoebe ordered. "We'll walk a little way up Mt. Fairview."

Obediently Mr. Martin put his pipe in one pocket and a box of tobacco in the other. "Why don't you talk it over with your mother?" he taunted his daughter. "You're afraid she won't agree with you."

"Put on your coat!" Phoebe commanded. "And don't let me hear another word out of you. You're the worst brought up father, Edward C. Martin, that I ever saw. You're a perfect I.W.W. of a parent. I'm ashamed of my work. There's no

obedience *in* you. It's about Sylvia," she continued, as he emerged into the rose-scented warmth of the early-summer afternoon. "And Ernest—and the twins—and everything." She slipped her arm into his.

"Oh, I know just what you're going to say," Mr. Martin exclaimed, cramming his pipe with tobacco and lighting it. "I get it from your mother all the time. Sylvia isn't bringing the children up right—supervises them too much—they're sissies."

"Yes, that's about it," Phoebe admitted. "Everybody's talking about it. It's one of the neighborhood jokes. I've tried to speak of it to Ern, but you know how he is. Everything Sylvia does is perfect and——"

"I think Sylvia's about right myself," Mr. Martin interrupted.

"Of course she is!" Phoebe asserted roundly. "I'm not criticising Sylvia. I think I understand it as other people don't. I've thought so many times of what Sylvia has told me about the struggle she and Marion had when they were left orphans so young. When I compare my life with theirs—why, father, Sylvia did all kinds of things to get through college. Telling stories to children, and being waitress at that hotel in Marblehead the year I met her. Sylvia told me once, father—this was after she got engaged to Ern—that not having had a home of her own for

so long and having lived in so many boarding-houses, she was frightened to death for fear she never could make a pretty home for Ern."

"Well, she certainly has made good on the house-keeping proposition," Mr. Martin commented. "Your mother says she's a wonder."

"I should say she had!" Phoebe agreed. "She said also that the wives and mothers that she knew were so round-shouldered and wrinkled and hollow-eyed and homely from too much child-bearing and so dowdy and frumpy from too much housework, that she was awfully afraid she'd get careless, too."

"Well, none of that has happened, has it?" Mr. Martin asked.

"No, of course not!" Phoebe answered. "But you see it's because she had such a sad childhood and because she knocked about so much from pillar to post during her childhood that she determined her children should *have* everything and *be* everything that's right. And it's ended in her doing too much for them. But really, father, it's getting to the point of absurdity. The twins aren't any more developed in certain ways than four-year-old tots. Of course, in other ways, they're much more developed. Sylvia reads to them all the time. She's teaching them the American Revolution now. She's always chasing to the encyclopedia to answer their questions. On the intellectual side they're extraor-

dinary, but on what you might call the *social* side, they're perfect failures. They don't know anything about how to play with other children."

"But after all, Phoebe," Mr. Martin said, "isn't this their business and don't you think we can depend on Ern to straighten it out?"

"No," Phoebe contradicted with conviction. "You see, Sylvia is just beginning to come out of the terrible condition that followed the death of the baby. She's *never* gotten over that—she wanted a little daughter so—and sometimes I think she never *will* get over it. Why, father, Ernest told me once that there were times after the baby died when he thought Sylvia was going insane. I know Ernest well enough to know that he wouldn't *say* or *do* anything that would bother her any more than he would knock her down. I think she worries all the time for fear something will happen to the twins. I thought you might say something to her."

Mr. Martin laughed. "I'm afraid you'll have to guess again, daughter. Interfering in family affairs, even if it is my own son, isn't my line at all."

"Well anyway, father, as long as we're out for a walk, let's go around and call on Sylvia."

As Ernest opened the door, voices came to him from the living-room. Sylvia was not alone as he had hoped. He glanced in,

"Hello, Phoebe! Hello, father!" He kissed his wife. "This is a regular family reunion, isn't it? Why didn't you bring mother?"

"Mother was tired," Phoebe explained. "She said she'd stay with the children. And besides, Dad and I wanted to have the little private talk together, which the rest of a jealous family so rarely permits to us. I like to walk with father, anyway; it's like being with royalty. All the females in the circumambient atmosphere nearly kill themselves to get a bow from the handsomest man in Maywood. I'm thinking of suggesting to the Maywood Woman's Club that they offer a cup to the most pulchritudinous male in town. The only objection to that is that they'd get my base, selfish motive right off."

"Well, I've taken so many cups in beauty contests," Mr. Martin said with an air of tolerance, "that I don't know that I want any more. Silver polish is so expensive these days."

Mr. Martin was a handsome man, although, in spite of his own words, it was apparent that he was not unduly conscious of it. In her girlhood Phoebe used to say that he looked like a leading-man. His thick, abundant white hair, crisply curling at the ends, accentuated a florid coloring, brows and lashes still black, and was in turn accentuated by them. He was a big man; but just as all his facial

contours, though full, ran to distinction of features, his bulk, full also, ran to shape.

"By the way, Ern," Phoebe went on, "mother always looks a little peeved when I say that. She seems to think that I ought to get you in on this beauty-contest business. I dare say that Sylvia agrees with her."

"My wife and my mother are not the only women in Maywood who would say that," Ernest asserted. "Thousands have assured me of their support. Still," he concluded with an effect of magnanimity, "I don't care who gets the cup so long as it stays in the family."

"Well, Ernest certainly has my vote," Sylvia said with a spark of archness. "I'm as proud as I possibly can be of his looks—especially," she added, "since I began to lose what little I had myself."

"Get out!" Ernest exclaimed. "You're a hundred times prettier than you ever were."

"You are, Sylvia," Phoebe agreed, "and if you would only dress a little more frivolously, you know what I mean—Daily-Hint-from-Paris stuff—do your hair loose about your face, the way you used to when I first met you, you'd be a wonder."

Sylvia was a little woman, slender, blonde, of the rare type we call seraphic. It was true that a post-maternal fading had set in, but it had given her quality, not quantity. Where formerly she had been

beautiful, she was now lovely, with that appealing fragility which the first period of fading often gives women. The hectic brilliancy which had characterized her of late now flooded her silver-ivory coloring with rose, starred her eyes with a deeper, a more poignant blue. It minimized a little the prim effect of her tightly knotted hair and of her little, Quakerishly-simple house dress.

Maturity and maternity had worked an altogether different process with Phoebe. Phoebe's hair, which had been feathery soft in lightness and amber gold in coloring, was like a shining metal, incisively carved. Her clear skin, which though it showed a touch of olive had always been colorless, now glowed with permanent roses. Happiness had rounded Phoebe out of her girlish slenderness; had gilded her lustrosly. Worry, ill-health, the sorrow of her little daughter's death, had tightened and whitened Sylvia, but it had set the light of character within; and that light shone through.

"Well," Phoebe said, "I always said when you were engaged that I never saw two people so much in love with each other. It's wonderful how you keep it up. I can't imagine you quarreling. Now, Tug and I fight like the *dickens*—at least I do—Tug doesn't. He's a very unsatisfactory husband in that respect. He simply *will not* argue. I'm always telling him it amounts to marrying a woman under false

pretenses. I've had to learn to sustain a quarrel all by myself. Oh, believe me, it's quite an art, but I *do* manage it. After I've raked Tug over the coals for *hours*, all he says is, 'You'll be sorry for what you've said when you think it over.' I could tear him limb from limb when he says that, for he's *always* right. The moment I think it over I *am* sorry. Then comes the struggle to make myself confess it to him. That's what made me the wreck of the husky woman I was once. I'm always in the position of having to apologize for what *I've* said, when everybody knows it's the sacred tradition of our sex to make them apologize for what we've said. Sometimes, when I think of it, I feel like an awful traitor to my kind. But one good thing—Tug's always forgotten about the quarrel when I start to tell him I'm sorry."

"Tug's life must be a perfect purgatory," her father commented.

"It's all of that," Phoebe admitted, "and then some. But *he* doesn't know it."

"He seems to thrive on it," Sylvia remarked.

"Oh, Sylvia," Phoebe exclaimed with a light leap to other topics, "I haven't told you what I came for. I bought you a present today. I was in town shopping this morning and there was a sale of *négligées* at Durkin's, and they were so cheap and so pretty that I bought one for myself and then I

bought one for you. It will get out here tomorrow."

"A *négligée*!" Sylvia exclaimed with a pleased inflection. "How sweet of you, Phoebe! I shall love it! I haven't had a new *négligée* since I don't know when."

"And that reminds me," Phoebe went on, "I was getting some books for the children, and I came across the most wonderful series, 'Nature and the Child,' for teaching children about birds and flowers and stars and minerals and all that truck. I promised Toland we'd study birds together this summer, so I bought the series. If it isn't a judgment upon me that I should spawn a child that's crazy about birds. I simply hate birds myself. Singing in the early morning, the way they do makes me wild. As for canaries—oh, I loathe them! All my life I've made fun of people who have the bird mania. Now I suppose for the next two months I'll be wandering about Maywood chasing disgusted robins from tree to tree, a bird book in one hand and an opera glass in the other. But, you really ought to have this series, Sylvia." She plunged into an enthusiastic account of the books.

Sylvia's eyes deepened with that look of absorbed interest which always came into them when anything was discussed that touched her children. Mr. Martin listened, putting in a word occasionally; Ernest listened, adding nothing. He was thinking whether

he should say anything to Sylvia about the twins when his father and sister left; and if he did, how he should put it. For a moment that talk did not look so easy or seem so necessary. As always, whenever he entered his house, a sense of peace, of beauty, of an exquisite order and cleanliness enveloped and permeated him. And, as he contemplated his wife's face, still shot with the flashing expressions of that perturbing vivacity, his resolution weakened, melted away. There were many other considerations which made criticism of Sylvia difficult for him. She was such a wife! Such a mother!

They occupied—the Ernest Martins—one-half of a two-family house. Sylvia always said that she choose it from the piazza before she saw the inside because the street looked, not so much as though it were lined with houses, as with real homes. It was a typical middle-class suburban street. The scraps of grass that surrounded the house were small enough to be kept always in the emerald and velvet of perfect condition. Vines softened architectural excrescences, added color and bloom. Bushes and flowers mitigated the bareness of the front lawns. Hedges of lattice-work fence veiled the intimate revelations of the back yard. Between houses and beyond back yards, the passers-by caught glimpses of the Maywood marshes. Straight ahead Mt. Fairview reached up from deep-tinted vegetable gardens

at its base to a summit tree-grown and of a respectable height.

The house, though small-roomed and cut-up, bore every imprint of Sylvia's fineness and fastidiousness. They had hired it before it was completed, and in consequence they had been permitted to choose the wallpapers. Dull, plain, simple effects, they minimized as far as possible the effect of the high gloss and higher carving of the woodwork. Some beautiful pieces of old-fashioned furniture, which had been Ernest's share of his Aunt Mary's possessions, stood with an added effect of stateliness against these quiet backgrounds. Sylvia had the gift of immaculateness. Her mahogany, however highly polished, seemed always speckless. The muslin curtains, which fluttered at her windows, seemed always crisp. Her kitchen closet offered a display almost as attractive as the china cabinet in the dining-room. Her bathroom maintained the hygienic cleanliness of a hospital. And whatever the season, leafy growths of some kind arose all over the house from low Japanese dishes.

Outside, their place consisted, like the others on the street, of but a scrap of lawn. Yet Sylvia had managed to grow a rose-garden at the side; its full-bloom fragrance came in through the dining-room windows now. Next door was a vacant house with one big space, mostly grass-grown in front, and

another space—bigger—mainly orchard, in back. The Taylor house, a survival of an amusing type of mid-Victorian architecture, peaked, cupolaed and jigsawed, had remained vacant all the years that the Martins lived in the neighborhood. It was typical of Sylvia's practicability in management that she had rented the Taylor barn to use partly as a play-house for the twins, and partly as a shelter for the cow which she immediately purchased. It was typical of her efficiency in management that she engaged as maid, a middle-aged Irish woman, a widow with a family of young children, who gladly took care of Molly in return for her share of the milk. Oh, Sylvia was an admirable housewife, a devoted mother, a perfect wife. Of all these things Ernest Martin thought as he listened to the conversation.

"Where are the twins?" Phoebe asked presently.

"In the barn," Sylvia answered. "I'll call them." She rang a little silver bell which stood on the window-sill close to her hand. Its faint, silvery peal was followed by the immediate appearance of two small boys in the doorway of the barn and by their quick scamper across the orchard.

"Goodness!" Phoebe ejaculated. "How quickly they come! I've had the hardest fight with my children to make them come to me the instant I call. I've named Edward the 'Wait-a-Minute-Goop.' "

"That's one thing I'm rigid about," Sylvia explained. "I've told the boys again and again that they must come the instant I call them, because I never do call them unless it's important. It might be danger—a fire or something like that. Sometimes I think they hope it *is* a fire."

"Where are you going this summer, Sylvia?" Phoebe asked.

"I don't know," Sylvia answered in an uncertain tone. "I can't quite make up my mind. Sometimes I think it will be easier just to stay here."

A little pause came. It lengthened itself into a silence that to Ernest's taut sensitiveness suddenly held a suggestion of embarrassment. Mr. Martin broke it by clearing his throat.

"Sylvia," he said, "you've had such hard summers recently and such expenses with doctors and nurses—and now the twins are so big—I wish you would let me send them to a boys' camp for their vacation. I'm sure it would do them good, do you good, and do Ernest good. What do you think, Ernest?"

"I think it would be great," Ernest answered without hesitation. He understood perfectly. Phoebe and her father had planned this between them. This was the real reason for their walk together. It did not offend him; he knew they were absolutely right. But that instinctive loyalty to Sylvia

which had never swerved, compelled him to add, "It's up to Sylvia. Whatever she says goes."

What Sylvia would say was obvious. Sylvia's face changed woefully. The pink flush that her vivacity had brought seemed to drop out of her cheeks, leaving them spotted and tallowy. The cerulean starriness of her eyes turned to a slaty blackness. Face, body, voice, she was all panic. "Oh, father, I couldn't—I simply *couldn't* let them go away from me. I'd worry so. You can't imagine what I'm like—Ernest knows—he can tell you. He and the twins are all that's really mine—except Marion. And if anything happened to one of them, it would kill me."

Mr. Martin laughed. "But nothing would happen, Sylvia. They'd have the best of care; they'd teach them how to row and paddle and ride horses and all kinds of outdoor things."

"I think they're too young to leave me, father," Sylvia protested, incipient hysteria bursting into her face. "I really do. Besides, Ernest can teach them all those things."

"Well, you don't have to decide at once, Sylvia," Mr. Martin said comfortingly. "Think it over."

The twins had in the meantime come running up the front steps. They shut the screen door quietly and deposited their hats in the hall closet. They held out limp little hands for Phoebe to shake and submitted courteously to her kiss. Then they climbed

onto their grandfather's lap and sat, one on each knee.

In that juxtaposition, the resemblance between the quartet of Martin males was striking.

Phoebe recognized it with an immediate "I've simply got to have another son—one that looks like the Martin family. We're much better-looking than the Warburtons."

Much darker in type than their grandfather, the twins were unmistakably his blood kin—a statement that their grandmother was very fond of making; although, as Phoebe pointed out, its cogency was much nullified by the fact that she made the same statement about all her grandchildren, even to Toland Junior, who was so perfect a replica of his father that it was almost comic. The twins were handsome children, dark-brown in the skin, cherry-red in the cheeks, coal-black in the hair and brows and lashes. Perhaps it was this clear-cut swarthiness that had from the beginning given them a look of natural determination. On to that look, however, had been superimposed another expression, curiously infantile, that was part the innocent limpidity of their eyes and part the dewy softness of their lips.

"I'm going away tomorrow for the whole day, Ernest," Sylvia said after Phoebe and Mr. Martin had gone and the children had run upstairs to wash

for dinner. "I got a telephone message from Marion early this morning; she wants me to come over there."

"What's happened?" Ernest demanded. "Marion not feeling well again?"

"Well," Sylvia answered noncommittally, "she's going to the doctor. I've decided to make a day of it. It's such a journey there and back. The children will be all right," she added quickly, as though forefending criticism. "Mrs. Fallon will take them to school and call for them."

"Of course they will," Ernest reassured her. "In fact," he added as though the result of an afterthought, "why don't you try letting them go alone to school tomorrow? I think it would be better if you left them oftener to shift for themselves."

"But they're such little fellows," Sylvia remonstrated. "Why, Ernest, they're only babies."

"Pretty big babies!" Ernest commented.

"That reminds me," Sylvia observed absently—his remonstrance had already rolled off her consciousness, leaving no impression—"I must telephone Haley not to come tomorrow to whitewash the barn. I want to superintend that job. He came this morning and fixed up Mollie's quarters. Mother's got something to tell her darling babies," she greeted the twins' return. Her language was not quite baby-talk, but it approximated it. She had a special tone

and a special vocabulary for the twins; and her tenderness blurred her words a little. "Tomorrow mother's going away for all day and her little boys must take care of themselves like great big men."

"Can we look in the robin's nest?" Gordon asked in the babyish pipe in which always he addressed his mother. "And the catbird's nest?" Edward supplemented in the babyish treble which he reserved alone for her.

"Yes, lamb-babies, if you are very careful," Sylvia consented.

Ernest listened in silence, but his sense of depression and repression returned. He could not help contrasting his sons with their cousin Toland. Phoebe's boy, although only three years older, seemed a man in comparison. Toland's tone—a palpable imitation of his father's—was round and deep. It came with perfect propriety from his sturdy figure. Toland was the terror of the neighborhood, but Ernest had many times heard him described as "some boy."

"I guess I'll ask Phoebe," Sylvia went on, absentmindedly skipping from subject to subject as had become typical of her in her abnormal condition, "if she'll let me return that *négligée*. I'll put some more money with it and get that child-nature series instead. I want to take up botany with the boys soon. It's

such a beautiful way of teaching them the facts of nature."

Ernest said nothing. Again he was getting up his courage to the protesting point.

"By the way, Ernest," Sylvia skipped again, "the stork brought a baby to the Prendegasts last night, a little girl. They say Mr. Prendegast's so happy to have a girl after three boys. He was just wreathed in smiles when he went down the street this morning. Everybody was waving to him from the windows."

"That's nice," Ernest said. "How's Mrs. Prendegast?"

"Oh, she's all right," Sylvia answered. "I guess anybody would be all right," she added wistfully, "when she's finally got what she wanted more than anything else in the world."

They were verging on dangerous ground now. Sylvia's eyes still filmed at the thought of the little daughter who had never breathed. Today, however, no such phenomenon manifested itself. Ernest abandoned the idea of further discussion of the twins. Perhaps after consideration, Sylvia would accept his father's offer and then, after all, training children was the woman's job. She would make many mistakes but time would rectify them. The main thing with him was that Sylvia should be happy. As the dinner bell rang, he dismissed the whole matter with a sigh of relief.

When, decorously piloted by Mrs. Fallon, the Martin twins returned from school the next day, they went at once to the Taylor barn. The lower floor was divided into two compartments, Molly's quarters and the twins' play-room. The latter was big and clean. Long windows made it light and airy. In the ceiling was a square opening, from which protruded wisps of sweet-smelling June hay. It contained a long, low table at which the twins worked; two little chairs in which they sat; and a comfortable rocker which ordinarily Sylvia occupied. Along one end of the room stretched a toy railroad; at the other end stood a big packing case which contained other possessions. On the table were arranged rows and rows of tin soldiers; some open cans of paint: two full of flaming scarlet, two full of brilliant blue, others half-full of brown, green, gray, white. A sheaf of paint brushes protruded from a glass of water.

"Let's paint some more of the soldiers," Gordon suggested. His voice had entirely lost its babyish, piping sound. It was quite business-like.

"Mother didn't say we could," Edward answered in a voice equally practical and normal.

"She didn't say we couldn't," Gordon suggested.

"All right then," Edward agreed. "Let's."

The boys slipped on their overalls and fell to painting. They dropped remarks from time to time,

but in the main they worked with an effect of concentration like grown-ups. Outside the hot June sun rolled down the hot June sky, began to shoot long, dazzling arrows of light through the open doorway. Suddenly the door darkened. "Say, what are youse fellers doun?" a voice called.

The twins looked up, startled.

Two boys stood in the doorway. Not any taller, not any broader, obviously their own age—they were very different in appearance from Gordon and Edward. The twins contemplated them intently and a look of surprise, that grew to wonder and ultimately held a shade of envy, came into their faces. They wore—the strangers—as few clothes as possible. Bare-armed, bare-headed, bare-legged, the most important article of their attire was a pair of cast-off-looking suspenders. These suspenders, greasy but importantly buckled and of a tautness that suggested a snapping, reliable elastic, bridged the hiatus between waists too tight and, so, kept open at the neck, and trousers too loose and, so, bagging far below the knee. It was only June; yet under the dirt on their faces, these boys were already tanned and burned. The bridge of their noses, the tips of their ears, showed pinky, freckle-specked peeling areas. One wore around his wrist a rag prominently ridged with dry blood. The other had hands rich with desirable warts. Their slim bodies were

packed with muscle. They chewed. As they surveyed the barn, their faces grew bright with curiosity; yet underneath lay, all the time undisturbed, the calm of conscious power. They looked, in short, perfect specimens of one type of young citizen who either by fair means or foul compels from a dull, tightly stratified urban life the romance and adventure which adolescence craves.

"We're painting red uniforms on these soldiers," Gordon answered. "They're British."

"We're going to fight in the battle of Bunker Hill," Edward obligingly volunteered. He pointed to a map of Charlestown drawn in white chalk on the floor.

"Good night, *nurse!*!" remarked one of their visitors. "The English is licked. Ain't that the dope, Mike? It's a cinch for the Americans."

"Sure," answered Mike. "The Americans should worry. My father was just after telling me the Americans would have got beat if it hadn't been for the Irish troops that came over from Ireland to help them."

This purple jargon may have been untranslatable to the Martin twins. At any rate, they kept silence. They listened politely, however, their eyes limpid pools of interrogation fixed on their visitors. This last remark, however, seemed to demand correction.

"Some Irish fought in our revolution," Gordon

said courteously. "They were very brave too. But I don't think there were any Irish troops sent from Ireland."

"Irish!" exclaimed Mike, instantly abandoning his brilliant, if untenable, claim. "The Irish won all the victories. My father told me last night that the last thing George Washington said when he lay dying was, 'Be good to the Irish! They saved the country!'"

Gordon made no further corrections. Perhaps he was unfamiliar with George Washington's death-bed utterances. But he and his brother continued to watch their visitors with interest. Those two young gentlemen advanced from the doorway, strolled about the room, inventoried with a careful attention its contents. They eyed a football with an interest only equaled by that with which they noted the baseball mask. They studied the position of the army, stationed at correct historical spots on the map of Charlestown, with a marked degree of concentration. But when they came to the toy track and examined the complications of its rails, the collection of cars and engines standing idly near, this concentration developed into another emotion.

"Say, where do youse fellers live?" Mike asked suddenly, turning back to the table. "This joint is vacant." He jerked a soiled and warty thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the Taylor house.

"Over there," Gordon answered, pointing through the doorway.

Mike and Tim surveyed "over there" with a closeness of observation which seemed to take in everything about the place.

"Say, if we go over there, will your mother give us a drink of water?" Tim inquired.

"My mother isn't at home," answered the guileless Gordon. "She's gone in to see Aunt Marion in West Roxbury. She won't be back until nearly seven."

"Well, there must be somebody there, ain't they?" Mike demanded in what purported to be indignation at this domestic carelessness. "Who's the skirt beating it out of the back door now?"

"That's Mrs. Fallon," Edward answered with an innocence equal to that of his brother. "No, there isn't anybody in the house now."

"Where's she goun?" Tim inquired.

"I don't know," answered Gordon. "She's got her coat and hat on. That means she won't be back for some time."

"Then there ain't nobody there," Mike concluded.

"No," Gordon answered. "But I'll go over and get you some water."

"Not this moment," Mike interposed, looking about him undecidedly for an interval; then, "Say,

Tim, I guess we'd better be beating it." He moved towards the door. Tim followed and they disappeared without farewell.

The twins, after a long, lucid-eyed stare in the direction of their guests, resumed their painting.

Suddenly the door darkened again. "Say," Mike called, "don't youse want to come out and see our motorcycle? We'll give yer a ride maybe." They disappeared.

The twins dropped their paint brushes and rushed out of the door. Quickly as they disappeared around one corner of the barn, Mike and Tim appeared around the other. "Say, aren't you the easy ones!" Mike commented disparagingly, as he and Tim dashing into the barn, slammed the door in their faces.

Gordon and Edward stopped stock-still, stood for a paralyzed instant. They looked hard at the door as though they expected it to open, but it remained closed. At last Gordon knocked gently, "Will you please let us in?" he said in the courteous accents of his careful training. "We want to finish painting the British army."

"Aw, shut up, you two sissies!" came from the barn. "Go home and do your sewing!"

"Sissies!" "Sewing!" It was obvious that neither of these terms pleased the twins. They stared at each other for a perplexed moment. Into the

infantile lucidity of their gaze flowed a vague alarm, and then, suddenly, as though each caught fire from the other, the alarm broke into a blaze of resentment. "You get out of this barn!" Gordon exclaimed finally. "Yes, you get out of this barn!" Edward supplemented. But their words were without force, and at the end, their tone ran down from command to entreaty.

"Aw, shut up!" the barn vouchsafed. "Fade away! There's a gang of girls playing dolls on the next street—why don't youse go over there? That's where you fit."

This remark, as obviously as the others, failed of soothing effect. The twins retreated uncertainly. A little distance from the barn, they paused as with one accord.

"What do you suppose they're doing in there?" Gordon demanded.

"They're going to steal our things," Edward answered promptly. "Our masks and soldiers and tracks and engines and cars and—and everything."

Gordon looked at his brother and his brother looked at him, and again as their glances met—they kindled. That blaze in the eyes spread in a dark flush, seemed to burn off the infantile sweetness which training had superimposed on Gordon's face. "Well, they won't get out of this yard with them," he announced with determination. He ran to the

door, kicked on it furiously. "You let us in and be quick about it!" There was no entreaty in his voice now—he bawled.

"Like ducks," came from the barn. "Say, Percy, you and your brother Clarence chase yourself around to where those girls are playing, and maybe they'll start some kissing games."

Gordon turned to his brother; the last hint of his babyhood vanished in the black scowl which transmogrified his look. A blood of rage, equally black, was washing every trace of infantile gentleness from Edward's face.

"I ain't going to let them steal none of our things," Gordon said. The unaccustomed double negative seemed in his case to have the effect of profanity.

"I ain't neither," Edward agreed firmly. "Let's go over to the house and get father's pistol. I know where he keeps it. We can shoot them."

"No," Gordon decided judicially. "That might kill them; then we would be arrested. No, I tell you what let's do! Let's climb into the loft through the window and throw the hay down on them. What's that?"

"They're winding up our engines," Edward answered. "All right. We'll hafter get the ladder outta the cellar—and, say, we gotta be awful quiet."

The twins sped across the field to the back of their

house and disappeared into the basement. They reappeared in a few minutes, carrying a short, light ladder. With an accumulating caution, they approached the barn, listened carefully at the door. From within came the noise of toy trains running along the track, colliding and derailing each other. Still moving very quietly, the twins placed the ladder against the barn wall, climbed up a short distance to the second story, disappeared through the window. The hay, which softened the fall of their bodies, nearly filled the loft. One side, however, was cleared. A row of buckets, full of whitewash, stood there ready for use. Working their way very slowly towards the opening in the center, they peered over the edge.

Directly below Mike and Tim lay flat on their stomachs. As the twins watched them, they began systematically to rip up the rails, disconnect them, place them in a heap at one side. This move seemed to act as an incentive to battle to the onlookers. With simultaneous movements, but working with an unexpected strength and speed, the twins seized each a huge wad of hay, thrust it through the opening, seized another, thrust that through, seized another and thrust that through.

Twin curses rose from below.

"What the——" Mike began in language that promised to be far from elegant and "We'll smash

your jaw for this," Tim proceeded in phrases that predicated an equal emotional unrestraint.

But the hay continued to pour down, and for a moment, haydust in their eyes and noses—and every time they opened them—in their mouths, the invaders did little but wallow about on the floor. At last, however, they scrambled to their feet, swayed, fell, scrambled up; swayed and fell again. From their lips poured an unbroken train of profanity, and the Martin twins, annexing in the instant a whole new vocabulary, responded with clearness, force, emphasis—and in kind.

Suddenly Mike reeled out of the radius of the torrent of hay. His arm, reaching for support, struck a can of crimson paint. Shaking the hay out of his eyes, he peered upward and hurled the can. It hit Gordon square on the cheek. The blood poured down his face and the paint poured over his body. Tim followed this with a tin of blue paint that rendered Edward unrecognizable. Then working together, Mike and Tim seized the other cans and hurled them upwards. Green, brown, gray, white—they added their hues to the twins' brilliant decoration. Much of the paint dropped backwards and the invaders were hoist with their own sticky petard.

For an instant, this violent attack gave the Martin boys pause.

The hay had given out; they glanced wildly about for further ammunition. Suddenly, Gordon seized one pail of the whitewash. Edward, imitating him blindly, seized another. They poured the viscid white fluid onto the heads of the enemy.

This was too much.

The invaders, dripping hay, paint and whitewash, made for the door, dashed it open, ran through the yard to the street, and vanished cursing. The warriors descended from above, pursued the enemy with triumphant yells, gazed after them until they disappeared. Then in a sudden silence that held a quality of apprehension, they returned and surveyed the colorful wreck of their pleasant play-room. Last they looked at each other.

Sylvia, returning a little later than her husband, found him reading a magazine in the living-room.

"Mrs. Fallon wasn't here when I got home, Sylvia," Ernest explained at once, "but there was a note under the door saying that her sister's child had had a fit and they had telephoned for her to come. She said the roast was cooking all right and would I take the vegetables off. I did."

Ernest spoke lightly, but he was scarcely considering what he said—Sylvia was so strange. Never had he seen that new effect of physical brilliancy—light, color, spirit—allied with so marked a condi-

tion of mental preoccupation. There was something remote about her; an element, so new and inexplicable, in her air that it made her alien, a being from another world. His heart sank.

As in a trance, not taking her things off, Sylvia moved about the living-room, mechanically rearranging it. "I know the child," she said. "She's a delicate little thing. I'm so sorry. I'll go down there tomorrow." Then after an instant of meditation, "The children must be in the barn still; let's go over and get them."

She did not speak again, but in a kind of rose-flushed, starry-eyed daze walked out of the house and into the orchard. "They're very quiet," she said under the shadow of the apple tree. Then she fell to silence again. "I wonder what they've been doing all this time," came after another bemused pause.

Suddenly Gordon's voice, clear as a bell and without a trace of prattle, rang out through the stillness. "Ed," he said, "that was a *damn* good fight!"

"Gordon," Edward responded with a tone equally bereft of infantile quality, "it was a *hell* of a fight!"

Then the twins appeared in the doorway.

Gordon looked as though he had been scalped. Red paint covered his head. It had flowed down

his neck in all directions, over the silken tie, over the linen shirtwaist that was Sylvia's handiwork. Red paint absolutely covered him. Edward looked less bloody, but more futurist. The blue paint had hit him on the chest, and run down his body until even his shoes and stockings were splashed. It had slipped through the opening in his overalls onto his corduroy trousers. To this had been added in eccentric designs gray and green and brown. Ernest gave them one glance; then, in terror of the effect on his wife, turned and looked at her.

Sylvia stood still—stood still for a long moment. She looked at the boys, who began to sputter explanations, almost as though they were strangers; looked at them carefully, one at a time, looked at them without a change of expression. When she spoke it was with a mild "I guess they're not hurt much. I think we'd better take them upstairs, Ernest, and put them right into the tub."

Ernest's alarm grew as Sylvia's extraordinary composure continued to maintain itself. She listened with calmness to the garbled account of the fight, which the twins, talking in impassioned language, at the same time and at the tops of their voices, recited many times. Even after the paint had been scraped from their faces and Gordon's forehead showed a bloody lump as big as a hen's egg and Edward's chest a purple bruise as wide as his hand,

she failed to develop tremor. In fact, she concurred without a quiver at Ernest's suggestion that he do the rest of the cleaning alone, and she disappeared as soon as he began his work. Ernest scrubbed strenuously for an hour.

He put the boys to bed; cleaned the bathroom. Then he started, his heart in his mouth, down the stairway.

"Come in here, Ernest," Sylvia called unexpectedly from their bedroom. "I want to talk with you."

Ernest advanced to the doorway, stopped abruptly there—stared.

Sylvia had taken off the suit she had worn to Marion's. She had put on the new *négligée* that Phoebe had sent her. It was of liberty silk of an exquisite glittering French blue, tied with ribbons of an equally glittering French pink. It had many lacy, frilly ruffles, knotted bows and flying streamers. The effect of strangeness that she had given on entering the house was not all her mood Ernest discovered. She must have stopped somewhere to have her hair done. It was coiled close but with elaboration. It had not been waved, but it dropped about her brow and onto her neck many wavy wisps of its own curls. She sat under a light which seemed to pour color onto her hair and then to refract it in diamond sparks. She was industriously polishing

finger nails which she had already buffed to an extraordinary gloss. Her eyes, as she lifted them from her work to her husband's face, were so luminous that it was as though extra lights suddenly burst in the room.

"Don't bother about the boys, Sylvia——" Ernest was beginning when she interrupted him.

"I'm not bothering about them, and I don't intend to. I want to talk with you about something quit different. Ernest, I told you a lie yesterday." She smiled with another increase of her brilliant luminosity. "At least, it wasn't quite a lie. You jumped to a conclusion, and I let you stay there. I didn't go to the doctor on Marion's account; I went on my own. I wanted to be sure—and I didn't want to say anything to you—until I *was* sure. But—Ernest—the thing I've hoped for and prayed for all these months is now going to happen. And Ernest—Dr. English says that I'm in perfect condition this time, and he can't see how there can be any danger possibly."

Ernest stood still in the doorway. He did not speak. He did not try to speak. He only looked at her.

"And, Ernest, I see now I've been wrong in the way I've brought the boys up—I didn't mean to be so foolish, but I was so afraid I was never going to have any more children. The thought that I

might lose one of them haunted me night and day. I've been so alone all my life, and I've always wanted a family so; but now when I think of another baby coming, all that worry fades away. I have such a sense—oh, such an enormous sense—of security and serenity and content and happiness. I know that everything will be all right. I know that everything will take care of itself. It's wonderful! How I wish you could experience it, Ernest! But I guess this is something that men can never have, only women! It compensates for all the agony it means to be a woman—every bit of it. And when I think of the attention I must give the new baby—oh, it makes me realize, as nothing else did, that there are certain social adjustments that boys must make for themselves—and girls too, perhaps. Anyway, the boys are going to school alone and going to play alone hereafter. I have no fear for them any more. I want them to learn to swim and ride and drive and play baseball and football and tennis—and box even—anything that's necessary for them to make fine big brothers for the little sister that's coming. And, Ernest, if I'm going to have a little daughter, I want to keep young and pretty for her sake. I'm going to Boston tomorrow and buy me a really frivolous new summer suit. I can wear it for quite a while you know, and I'm going to keep my nails looking pretty, and have my hair waved every week

until—— And I'm so happy that I want to do something gay at once. I want you to get tickets for tomorrow night for that musical comedy, 'The Champion and the Amazon.' "

CHAPTER IV

THE LONG CARRY

SO don't worry any more, Ernest!" Sylvia said. Her voice held a gay note of command; but underneath it ran a sober current of entreaty.

Ernest smiled a perfunctory reassurance. "No, I won't worry."

"Good-by, dear," Sylvia concluded.

"Good-by."

Sylvia gazed for a minute or two after her husband as he walked down the street to the station. As the distance between them increased, the spirit seemed to flow out of him. After a while, a faint crumple crooked the splendid erectness of his figure. By corresponding slow degrees, the radiance which had illumined her face as she lifted it to his good-by kiss, evaporated from it. She sighed. But turning toward the house, her spirits lifted again. From within came the sound of the revelries which always characterized the twins' Saturday morning. Sylvia strolled up the walk slowly. And then another serious consideration seized her. Again her face sobered.

Inside, "Boys!" she called. "Come downstairs! There's something in the kitchen I want to show you."

The two sturdy, virile black-browed little lads came tumbling into view. Gordon arrived downstairs first, by the simple expedient of taking to the banisters. "The fellers are coming over for football pretty soon," he informed his mother. "They said they'd come right after breakfast," Gordon supplemented him.

"This won't take long, sons," Sylvia promised them. "And you'll like it."

She led the way through the hall into the big, old kitchen. Maggie was doing the dishes with a great swish of soapy water and to the accompaniment of an Irish song. The sunlight poured on her draining-board covered with steaming glasses. Sylvia continued into the back hall.

"Oh, I know!" Gordon said with all the electric thrill of a good guess in his voice.

"I don't," Edward declared, mystified. And then, guessing in his turn, "Oh yes, I do——"

"Lady's kittens have come," Gordon interrupted.

"That's it," Sylvia admitted. She knelt beside the big clothes-basket in the corner. "Four of them! See what darlings they are! Careful, son!" as Gordon made an impulsive dive into the furry mass. "Let me take them out for you."

Her long white hands moved with a gentle firmness among the tiny, languidly-squirming forms. One by one, she lifted the kittens from the basket to the floor. They dragged about, squeaking disconsolately. Lady put her front paws on the top of the basket and peered apprehensively over its edge. "We aren't going to hurt your babies, little mother," Sylvia soothed her. "We wouldn't hurt them for the world. Be gentle with them, boys. Remember, Lady is still weak and very much frightened for fear you'll injure them." Imitating their mother, the boys stroked the purblind little creatures with faint, delicate touches of their forefingers. Lady watched every move with spurting ears and a pivoting head.

"Now I think we'll put them back," Sylvia decided suddenly. One by one, she placed the little balls of fluff in the basket. Lady cuddled down to the demands of their immediate hunger. "When did they come?" Gordon demanded.

"In the night," Sylvia answered. "Maggie found them when she got up. She said Lady acted as proud as a peacock."

"Did it hurt much?" Edward asked.

"Lady looks very tired. Do you see how thin and drawn her face is? We must be very gentle with her for a while."

"How soon will their eyes be open?" asked the exact and accurate Edward.

"In a few days," Sylvia answered absently. "Now, boys, come into the living-room for a moment. I've something to tell you."

"But mother, football——" Edward began.

"You've got plenty of time," Sylvia assured him. She led the way into the living-room which, like every room that Sylvia furnished, had something exquisitely conventional about it. She seated herself in the big old wing-chair; drew the little boys one on each side of her; sat holding in each hand a tiny, red rough paw. As she talked, she looked from one face to the other; and she reflected, as she had reflected many times before, that one might have been a mirrored vision of the other. The coloring of Edward duplicated that of Gordon; the chiseling of Gordon duplicated that of Edward. And yet how conclusively—but subtly—they differed! They differed in expression to the precise degree and in exactly the way that, temperamentally and intellectually, they differed; Edward all quiet-faced astuteness; Gordon all starry-eyed calm. Edward questioned every detail of his universe; Gordon was "native and endued" to wonder.

"My little sons," Sylvia began, smiling, "do you remember how, last month, a baby sister came to live with Tony Dorrance?"

The twins nodded, uninterested. At every sound outside, their eyes sought the window as though it opened a vista into football. Sylvia pressed the little red paws emphatically.

"Well, that same wonderful thing is going to happen to us. In a few months, a baby will come to live here in this house."

She stopped and examined the two little faces. They bore the revelation characteristically. Gordon's wide luminous eyes grew if possible wider and more luminous. Edward's eyes narrowed to attention, his brows ruffled to question. "Will it be a boy?" he asked hopefully.

"It may be a baby brother. I hope it will be a baby sister, but I can't be sure."

"I'd rather it would be a brother," Edward decided promptly.

"So'd I," agreed Gordon. "Girls aren't any good—teachers' pets and tattle-tales and 'fraid-cats.' He paused a moment and added conclusively, "All of them."

"No, some sisters are better," Edward disagreed meditatively. "Tom's sister Elsie makes candy every Saturday morning."

"It will be a long time before this sister will make any candy." Sylvia laughed in spite of herself. "Remember she will be *little*—not quite so little perhaps—but almost as helpless as Lady's kittens."

"Will she be red," Gordon asked disapprovingly, "like Tony's sister?"

"Probably," Sylvia answered.

"Will her eyes be open?" Edward demanded.

Sylvia laughed again. "Yes, and I hope they'll be as blue as the sky."

"What will her name be?" Edward went on with what threatened to be a rain of practical inquiries.

"Elizabeth-Marian," Sylvia answered. "Elizabeth, after your Grandma Martin; and Marian, after Tante Marian. And we shall call her Beth. But if it's a boy—well, what shall we call it, if it's a boy?"

"Jess Willard," Edward answered promptly. And, "Ty Cobb," Gordon immediately followed him.

"There might be more than one," Sylvia suggested. "You two little boys came together."

"Oh, mother," Gordon begged, "don't let's have two girls!"

"Couldn't we have four babies all at once—just like Lady?" Edward offered hopeful solution. "We could drown the girls."

Sylvia continued to laugh. "Suppose they were all girls?"

"We might keep *one*," Gordon permitted.

"No," Edward differed. "Let's drown them all, if they're girls."

Sylvia's mirth bubbled on. "But you see father and mother both want a little daughter. Our hearts are set on its being a Beth."

Gordon fixed his eyes on his mother's face. The luminosity, that normally filled them, was glowing deeply, as always happened when a train of thought threatened to explode in question. Sylvia waited.

"Mother, where do babies come from?" he demanded.

Involuntarily Sylvia sighed. She had been expecting this. In fact, deliberately she had led up to it. But somehow she had thought the question would come from the definite-minded, explorative Edward, not from the vague, wool-gathering Gordon. For a moment, this tiny unexpectedness nearly threw her from the track of her purpose. But arousing herself, she started determinedly on the story, half analogy, half fable, that she had invented for them.

"You remember how I told you a few weeks ago that Lady was going to give you a family of little kitties and—— I told you that you must be very careful the way you handled Lady because—— It's like that with all mothers: kitty-mothers, puppy-mothers, bear-mothers, lion-mothers, and women-mothers—— But although it means pain and suffering, it seems to be the way it must happen——"

This had been a moment and a narrative for which Sylvia had planned ever since the birth of the twins.

And yet now she told it half absently. For suddenly it was not the faces of her sons that she saw; but Ernest's figure growing more and more careworn in aspect as it retreated down the hill. Indeed, it was not to the twins that she addressed herself, but to Ernest's drawn look. It was not into the innocent orbs which kept so trustingly their steady gaze on her that she stared, but through them, into Ernest's troubled blue-gray eyes.

"God has made a little room right under the mother's heart—so that her heart can keep watch—a little room as warm and soft and safe—And in that little room, the baby grows bigger and stronger and stronger until—Then comes a day when the baby is ready to enter the world—We call this being born—"

How simple it all sounded, reduced to the lowest terms and clothed in the language of imagery! Oh, if for Ernest's sake, it could only be as simple as this . . . as effortless. . . . Oh, to save him the long, dead black wait . . . that beating, scarlet agony at the end. . . .

"And when the time comes for the baby to be born—just that moment, not an instant before, not an instant after—but at exactly the right, beautiful moment—God opens the little door in that soft, warm, safe room under the mother's heart and the baby comes out in the world." Sylvia paused.

Ernest's care-worn face disappeared. The faces, wholly interested, entirely receptive, a little puzzled, of her two sons came back into her vision.

They were still receiving the revelation characteristically. It was like, she remembered, the first time they had seen a flying-machine. Gordon accepted it serenely and lucidly, as one of the expected magics of a magical universe; like giants and mermaids and fairy godmothers. But Edward, appalled at this contradiction of every law of his practical world, had actually turned pale; had rushed, as though for sanctuary, to a storm of hysterical questions.

It was Edward who, immediately annexing her phraseology, demanded, "When will our brother come into the world?"

"About Christmas, I think." Sylvia smiled happily. "This is my Christmas gift to you—a little sister."

"I hope it will be a brother," Edward reiterated obstinately.

"We can give it away," Gordon suggested, "if it's a girl."

"No," Sylvia decided. "There's one thing that absolutely *can't* be given away, and that's a little newborn baby. Now, there are two things more that I'm going to say to you, boys. Everybody knows what I've just told you—about that little room

where the baby lives before it's born. Everybody. *Everybody!* But because everybody knows it, nobody speaks of it. You see there's really no reason for talking about a thing that *everybody* knows. So I want you, my sons, to promise me two things. One is not to talk about this to anybody. And the other is: if as you think it over—now or for years to come—you have any questions to ask about it, you'll ask me. My sons," Sylvia's voice sank to a solemn deepness, "I give you my word that I will always tell you the truth. Will you promise me these two things?"

The little boys promised readily enough.

But after the twins had raced off to their exigent football, Sylvia began again to see—not Edward's astute, inquiring look, nor Gordon's luminous understanding one—but Ernest's drawn, worried aspect.

Sylvia herself entertained no doubt as to the outcome of the next few months.

But Ernest—— And small wonder! The birth of the twins had been a long and agonizing session from which he had emerged almost as gray and ghastly as his wife. Sylvia herself did not like to think of that black and murky period which followed the birth—and death—of her little daughter. Ernest never referred to it. And by that token, Sylvia guessed the exact degree of agony which his Gol-

gotha had held for him. Her face shadowed as she thought of it; but out of that shadow, without an instant of preparation, suddenly flashed the serene happiness of her smile.

For the love which Ernest bore Sylvia, and which Sylvia bore Ernest, was one of those loves that are the wonder, envy, doubt, scoff, according to the temperaments, of those who see it. Among their friends, their union was jokingly described as "the perfect hitch." Ernest Martin was distinctly a monogamous type. Sylvia's face had wiped off the slate of his mind the face of every girl that destiny had previously drawn there. And no other woman's face had since threatened her reign. Whenever Ernest looked at his wife, the expression in his eyes deepened to tenderness. That look always met an answering look in Sylvia's eyes—worship and understanding and complete trust. But lately another expression had come to crowd the worship of Ernest's gaze. That expression was fear. Six months of an augmenting, anguished anticipation lay behind Ernest. Three months of an accelerating, anguished anticipation lay before him. And at the end—

How to save him from it?

Sylvia rose, walked listlessly out of doors into the autumnal disarray of the garden. She moved about absently, gathering flowers for the house; blood-red dahlias; bronze-brown asters; bachelor buttons,

earnestly azure; salvia, excitedly scarlet. She approached the bed of California poppies. Multitudes of tiny buds, twisted like spills of golden satin, lay flexed awaiting the sun. One alone had begun to unwind orange-tawny wings. And as Sylvia stood before it, a miracle happened.

There came a faint delicate flutter and—— Imperfection had changed to perfection. Youth had turned into maturity. A bud had become a flower.

Sylvia stood stock-still before the miracle for a long time. Obviously, she was thinking hard; for her brows knitted and her teeth gnawed her lips. And then, suddenly, an idea seemed to thrill up from her subconscious to her conscious mind. It brought with it a lucid brightening of her eyes, a jerked lift of her breast. It held her for a moment at what seemed a high pitch of question; and under that stress, her color mounted and her lips parted. Then obviously the question resolved itself to determination. She walked briskly back to the house. And as she walked, she smiled rapturously.

Once inside, she went immediately to the telephone; called up both her doctor and her nurse. She supplemented these two long talks with a third, equally protracted.

“ You solemnly promise me, Harriet Mabie? ” she concluded the last one.

"I solemnly promise you, Sylvia Martin," Miss Mabie promised.

The months—there must be three of them—went by slowly. Sylvia made her life as busy as possible. As long as she could, she went out with Ernest. But necessarily, her activities grew circumscribed; her days increasingly quiet. A little walk; a little putting in the garden; sewing; her twilight stories with the twins; an occasional attendance at the club; an occasional appearance at a small tea—this was her program.

All the time, Ernest's evening absences grew steadily fewer and fewer until he was never absent. Sylvia tried every system she knew, from secret wifely diplomacy to direct personal appeal, to get him out of the house. But to her gentle feminine obstinacy he opposed his quiet masculine stubbornness. Sylvia could not move that dead weight. After a while she gave up the effort.

Then developed the inevitable period of frantic telephoning. Not obviously frantic, of course; all the boiling anxiety, carefully disguised under casual inquiry, as:

"Oh, Sylvia, I called up to find out if there's a package of papers on the desk. I was afraid I might have left them on the train." Or, "Say, Sylvia, suppose you could go for a little walk, if I

came out early this afternoon?" Or, "Oh, Sylvia—I saw some fine celery in the market today. I thought you might want to know that I'm bringing some out for dinner."

To these bombardments, Sylvia opposed her unalterable serenity, her invariable, "I'm feeling splendid, this morning, Ernest." Or, "Oh, yes, I'd love a little walk this afternoon."

Then followed the period, equally inevitable, of Ernest's sudden appearances, early in the afternoon. "I felt a little done up today somehow," he would account for them; or, "I felt rotten—as though I had a cold coming on." Or, "There wasn't much doing in the office this afternoon; so I thought I'd beat it home and get a nap."

"Ernest," Sylvia said one night, "it's out of the question my going out socially any longer. But I feel so well and this waiting round bores me so, that I would like to do something in the evenings. There is one thing I really would find very entertaining."

"Well, for the love of Mike, what is it?" Ernest demanded.

"This will amuse you, I know. But I'd just love it, and I want you to say yes. It's whist! I like whist and I used to play a fairly good game once—a really, rather complicated signal game. Old Mrs. Whitcomb was saying the other day that Mr. Whit-

comb was just dying for some whist. He's a shark, you know."

"Yes, I know," Ernest admitted grimly. "I've played against him on the train."

"Yes, he's a shark," Sylvia went on. "But he isn't one of those hateful, disagreeable sharks. He doesn't criticize you. He doesn't mind playing with *anybody* as long as you give your whole attention to the game and try to win. And he never calls you down; although he will give you all the instruction in the world if you ask it. He's an eccentric old thing. But do you know, Ernest, I like him. I have always liked him."

"That's queer," Ernest observed, "you hate so many people."

"And I've always had a feeling that he liked me."

"That's even queerer," Ernest added. "So many people hate you."

"Well, I was thinking—" Sylvia ignored her husband's levity, "Ernest, will you stop into the Whitcombs' on your way to the train this morning and ask them if they'll come in this evening to play with us?"

The whist foursome, thus started, grew first into a three-nights-a-week and then to a every-night-a-week performance, in which Sunday was the only respite. The imperturbable Ernest and the phlegmatic Mrs. Whitcomb submitted without a murmur

to the nightly beating, which the strategic Mr. Whitcomb, reinforced by the tactical Sylvia, administered to them. Sylvia enjoyed her small triumph enormously. "Do you know, Ernest," she said again and again, "I really love whist. I have always loved it. After we get going, I could play all night. And Mr. Whitcomb is a partner after my own heart. Nothing would stop him but death. Some fine evening, after Miss Elizabeth Marian Martin has become a big, bouncing young lady, I'm going to start at eight o'clock in the evening, and keep on playing till I've had enough, if it takes till sunrise."

"Well, you certainly are developing some game," would be Ernest's comment.

Again and again at the breakfast table, Sylvia said, "Really, we stopped too soon last evening. Oh, I wanted so much to play longer."

But, "Every night at eleven for you, young lady," Ernest laid down the law, "until we are a bigger family."

And, "Ernest, you don't know how fond I'm getting of the Whitcombs," Sylvia said, in one form or another constantly. "Isn't it funny how you get to know some people at once and how you never really know others until something out of the ordinary brings them out? Here we've lived opposite the Whitcombs for ten years, and I suppose if I hadn't thought of playing whist with them, I never

would have gotten really acquainted with them. I always thought of Mrs. Whitcomb as a feather-bed, down-puff, lamb-stew sort of woman; and of Mr. Whitcomb as a sort of queer, dried-up old thing. But, oh, how kind they've been to me and how considerate! I can't tell you all the good advice that Mrs. Whitcomb has given me or the sensible suggestions she's made! After all, Ernest, a woman who has brought up five boys well, is no fool. And as for Mr. Whitcomb—it seems as though he was thinking of my comfort every minute!"

"Yes, they're regular people," Ernest agreed. "I'm glad I've had this chance to get to know them. I hope I have an opportunity of doing something for them some time."

But multiply these gentle efforts as she would, Sylvia never really succeeded in getting Ernest's mind off its major worry; and she knew it. That Ernest watched her stealthily, she was all the time perfectly aware. Any sudden change in the expression of her face brought to his figure a momentary petrification. Any sudden move of her body tore his attention from whatever he was doing. And as her physical languor grew—with an accelerating and augmenting sense of unease—his watchfulness increased.

One night the whist game started with a sudden dash of gaiety; for Sylvia unloosed a vein of talkativeness, unusual in her. "Oh, how I'm enjoying

this!" she said again and again. "Somehow, I never felt more like playing whist than I do this evening!"

"No wonder—with the cards you're holding!" Mrs. Whitcomb remarked caustically. "Ernest, she stacks them!"

"That hasn't anything to do with it!" Sylvia maintained. "Ernest, I'm sorry for you! Mrs. Whitcomb, I'm a yellow dog but this is a grand slam. I feel it in my bones that Mr. Whitcomb and I are going to beat you to a frazzle. Ernest, you've got to call that eleven-o'clock rule off to-night! For once, I'm going to get all I want of it!"

It was just as she started to deal, a little later, that Sylvia arose suddenly from the table. "My goodness! I nearly forgot—— It's just come to me——" she exclaimed, unaccustomedly ejaculatory. "I ought to have telephoned—— What an idiot I am to say that I'll do anything when—— Here, Ernest, you deal for me! And don't you dare to break my run of luck! I've got to call somebody up——"

She hurried into the back room; opened a low-voiced conversation over the telephone. Concluding her talk, she rejoined the whist players long enough to make the trump royal spades and to give her jubilant partner the opportunity of sweeping to

victory on a second grand slam. While this was going on, she returned to the telephone; took up more conversations. She had scarcely rejoined the whist players when the bell rang. Mr. Whitcomb was dealing. Sylvia herself opened the door.

"Oh, Harriet!" she exclaimed. "How glad I am to see you! How did you know that I wanted somebody at this exact moment? We are having a game of whist. Would you mind taking my hand for a few minutes? There's something I'd forgotten all about that I simply must do before I go to bed."

"You're a sweet, tactful thing, Sylvia." Miss Mabie's rather severe spinsterly face broke into an understanding smile. "But I'm not going to break up the party. I'll just sit here and watch you."

"But, Harriet, I'm telling you the truth," Sylvia insisted. "There are some Christmas boxes that I solemnly promised Miss Farr that I'd have packed and ready, if she'd send a messenger for them in the morning. I forgot all about it until this moment. It won't take me a jiff to do it now; but I don't want to have to get up for it tomorrow. You see I stay in bed till about ten."

"All right." Miss Mabie stepped into Sylvia's place; shuffled the cards; handed them to Ernest to cut; dealt them: all these with the decisive movements of a practised hand.

"You'll tire yourself all out, Sylvia," Ernest

prophesied. "Why don't you wait and let me do it for you?"

Sylvia laughed. "Ernest, you're the noblest of created husbands; but I'd hate to receive the Christmas box that you packed. No, it really ought to be done tonight; and it happens that I feel just like doing it."

"If you want any help——" Ernest persisted. Both Mrs. Whitcomb and Miss Mabie reinforced him with polite murmurs.

Sylvia thanked the ladies, but declined their kind offers with haste and decision. On her way past her husband, however, she stopped to lay a little kiss on both his cheeks. "I shan't need any help, goose!" She added casually, "I'm going to shut this door. I've felt a little draft all the evening."

"Yes, I feel it too," Miss Mabie admitted.

Sylvia disappeared. Her absence grew prolonged. Once or twice, Ernest said, "Do I hear somebody walking in the hall?" But always Miss Mabie answered quietly, "I don't think so. I can't hear anything."

The game went on and on. Miss Mabie, it developed, was a player. And under the spur of her masterly offensives, Mr. Whitcomb outdid himself.

About ten, the door of the living-room opened. Maggie appeared. "Mrs. Martin says that she feels a little tired and that she's going to bed, sir.

But she says to please keep on with your game, as she can't hear a sound up there."

They kept on. And suddenly Ernest and Mrs. Whitcomb ran into so extraordinary a run of luck that they were inspired to reinforce it by an unwonted brilliancy of playing. The exhilaration of their success carried the game over the line of ten o'clock, over the ridge of eleven o'clock, over the height of twelve o'clock, and one, towards two—

Mrs. Whitcomb had just finished saying, "Oh, let's have another rubber! Don't look at your watch, Silas! We might just as well be hung for a—— I never enjoyed a game more in my life!" when again the living-room door opened.

It was not Maggie this time. Instead it was a cool-looking, blonde young woman in a nurse's uniform.

Ernest's cards dropped out of his hands. "Miss Dinsmore! How——"

Miss Dinsmore's keen gray eyes sparkled. "Mr. Martin," she announced, "your wife begs me to present her compliments and to say she would like you to step upstairs. She wants to introduce you to Miss Elizabeth Marian Martin, who has just arrived, weighing nine pounds; mother and daughter both doing well."

CHAPTER V

THE NEST EGG

IT was a marvelous June day. But the fact that it was the middle of the week could not alone account for the unnatural silence of the Warburton household. The weather had seemingly lured every member of the family to secret, exhilarating devices.

"Cely and Bertha-Elizabeth are tramping up Mount Fairview," Phoebe answered her mother's question. "Toland is playing baseball somewhere, and Edward—to Toland's intense disgust—tagging after him. Micah is at Sylvia's. Phoebe-Girl is—I don't know where Phoebe-Girl is." Phoebe stopped to meditate. "Now, where can that child be? When did I see her last? Oh yes—just after lunch she started off with that little Daisy Brooks she's so crazy about—she said to play paper dolls at Daisy's."

"Well," Mrs. Martin remarked, "if you can keep count of Phoebe-Girl's activities, you do well."

"I don't pretend to," Phoebe asserted lightly. "She's the most active of my children and sometimes I think the strongest."

"She's had fewer sicknesses certainly," Mrs. Martin agreed. "Oh, what a day this is! It is the kind of day I most love and the season that I guess is my favorite after all. I love the daisies and buttercups. And when the sky is full of those great heavy clouds—all crowded together like that—it always takes me back to my youth and makes me think of those dreams you have then—long sea journeys—and the ocean being filled with white sails—and you going, you don't know where, except that in your fancy you're always putting in at strange ports and seeing wonderful strange cities and picturesque strange people."

"I know," Phoebe said with a little agreeing nod: "I remember that period so well. Every girl has it, I guess. That feeling that comes to you that all life lies before you and the whole world is open to you and anything—simply *anything*—may happen. It seems as though it was all chance; and yet you have the feeling that chance will favor you in sending you all kinds of adventures and romances and beautiful journeys. And then you get engaged—and married—and suddenly the universe contracts into one tiny world which holds your babies. All those dreams of your future and those yearnings for something different evaporate out of your mind."

"But there is something better that comes to take their place," Mrs. Martin affirmed.

"Yes, something better," Phoebe agreed. "Sometimes I wish you could have both, though. I don't see why life can't be managed so you could."

"For *women*, you mean?" Mrs. Martin queried.

"Yes, *particularly* women," Phoebe elucidated. "For the chances are, they'll never have it again."

Mother and daughter sat on the side piazza which faced the tennis court. The street cut across their left and to their right beyond the garden—a delicate phantasmagoria of the spring colors—marsh country leaped by green squares, bounded with lines of silver ditches, to the very foot of Mount Fairview. It was the longest day in the year, and the sun was still far from setting. It held a brilliant place high in the sky, from which it flooded the world with dazzling impulses of light.

Mrs. Martin, as in conversation was her unconscious but subtly flattering habit, considered Phoebe's words thoughtfully.

"I expect that's the new generation talking," she decided after a while. "I can't go with you on that. But then that's the way life is. I remember I had ideas that my mother never would agree with. And you have ideas that I can't accept. And I expect the time's coming when Bertha-Elizabeth or Phoebe-Girl will come home with some scheme for education or work that will make your blood run cold."

"I expect they will," Phoebe admitted. "And I'm trying to prepare myself for them, whatever they are!"

"Don't say that, Phoebe," her mother warned her excitedly. "Whatever you say, don't say that. That's the strangest part of it. If it were anything you could anticipate—— But it never is. It's always the last thing in the world that you would imagine and just the last thing in the world that you want. It breaks up all your plans and often seems as though it were going to ruin your whole scheme of life. What's that tramping I hear in the distance?"

Phoebe listened, her head cocked attentively. "Oh, just people coming up from the marsh section," she explained lightly. "I wonder which one it will be. Will it be Toland who will want to retire to a monastery; or Bertha-Elizabeth who will decide to go into the movies; or Phoebe-Girl who will insist on nursing in the leper colony in Molokai; or Edward who will take up aviation; or Micah who'll become an interpretive dancer? Well, at least there are only five possibilities."

"Only five now," Mrs. Martin said with emphasis.

"Only five, mother," Phoebe repeated firmly. "My family is the exact size that I want it. It's not going to be any bigger."

"I've heard those statements before," Mrs. Martin remarked dryly.

"All right, mother—wait and see!"

"What can those people be doing?" Mrs. Martin demanded curiously. "Nobody's talking. And there seem to be children with them—— Somebody's crying——"

"Oh, they'll come past the house in a moment," Phoebe answered unnottingly. "Then we'll see what it's all about. But honestly, mother, I think five is a very nice size for a family, don't you?"

"Yes," Mrs. Martin agreed.

"Three boys and two girls," Phoebe summed up her jewels with satisfaction. "A very nice arrangement. Perhaps I would have liked Toland to be the oldest one in the family. But I suppose that's because I'm prejudiced. I was older than Ern and I always looked down upon him and patronized him and bossed him. I used to yearn for a big, handsome, stunningly dressed—*clean*—brother that I could be proud of; instead of a younger brother who was always—sartorially speaking—a disgrace. And then I think if a girl is the oldest one in the family, she always has so much responsibility."

"That's true," Mrs. Martin asserted. "I know that from experience. I was the oldest in our family, you know."

"But if there was ever any one born to be an

oldest sister," Phoebe went on analytically, "it's Bertha-Elizabeth. She really mothers the rest of the family. If I were to die, I truly believe that child could run the house and take care of the family."

"I believe she could," Mrs. Martin agreed with her daughter. "What's that—— Why, they've opened the gate! They're coming here! *Phoebe!* Oh, my God!" For Phoebe had leaped to a height, suddenly towering—and her face—— She was like one standing up dead.

Four men, bearing between them a door, were coming up the path. On the door lay something human-shaped—that dripped—covered with a blanket. Ahead, hatless, white-faced and wild-eyed, wiping streaming tears with her kitchen apron, came Mrs. Connors. Other women, terrified and silent, brought up the rear; a queue of frightened children followed; Daisy Brooks sobbing.

Phoebe darted a jagged look of agony at Mrs. Connors. "Bertha-Elizabeth!" she said. But it was herself she questioned and her lips were stone. Her feet seemed not to touch the ground as she flew down the path.

"No, woman dear," Mrs. Connors' writhing lips answered, "Phoebe-Girl."

"It's no use to say those things to me, mother, they make no impression on me. And I don't be-

lieve them. My child is *dead*. Nothing can alter that. And nothing will ever reconcile me to it. Of course you're being kind, I realize you have to say those things to me. I have said them myself to other people. All my life! It's a sort of silly convention that keeps up—like how-do-you-do when you meet people. How-do-you-do means nothing. You don't really care how they do. The worst bore I ever knew was a man who when you said 'How do you do?' answered by telling you how he did. I appreciate that you mean only to be comforting in saying what you are saying. But it doesn't do any good. I don't believe it. My child is dead. My life is over."

"Oh, but, Phoebe, my little girl, other people have lost children—and life has gone on and they've been happy again."

"Other people! What other people have suffered interests me very little now, mother. I don't know anything about them nor care anything about them. All I know is about myself. And I shall never get over this—never, never. My heart is like lead. I know I'm going to carry that load around with me as long as I live."

"Phoebe dear!" And for a moment the tenderness of her feeling wiped from Mrs. Martin's voice the hoarseness of her grief. "Phoebe dear, your mother knows what she's talking about. I lost a

child once—little Albert. You never saw him, so you can't remember him—but of course I do, just as though it were yesterday. I thought I was never going to get over that loss. But I did. And oh, how many happy, happy years I have had with you and Ernest and your father!"

"I can't help it, mother, if I can't believe you," Phoebe remonstrated in her stone-cold, stone-hard voice. "I suppose you think you loved little Albert as I love Phoebe-Girl. But if you could get over his death, I know you didn't. For I shall never get over Phoebe-Girl's death. I think I loved her better than any of my children."

"You don't mean that, Phoebe," her mother said, still tenderly but with a deeper gravity. "You say it only because she's gone."

"If there had been a single thing in my life to prepare me for it," Phoebe said listlessly, "but there hasn't been anything."

"That is true, poor little girl," her mother agreed, "nothing in life has prepared you for such a loss. You've had such a happy childhood and such a happy girlhood and such a happy marriage and young motherhood. Why, Phoebe, sometimes I've trembled for you. Sometimes it's seemed to me as though life or fate or chance—or all of them—actually *conspired* to keep you happy. You've never had any of the blows that other women have had. Think of

Sylvia, and how she nearly went insane when her little girl was born dead. Look at Molly Tate with three babies dead, one after another. Think of Florence Marsh losing that lovely little Walter. Look at——”

“Mother, it doesn’t do any good to tell me about these other cases. I’m sorry for them, of course; but it doesn’t help my case. I’ve lost her. She’s gone. She’s gone forever. *Forever*. Do you realize what *forever* means, mother? I shall never see her again, my beautiful, beautiful baby.”

“Not in this life,” Mrs. Martin murmured.

“At this moment,” Phoebe asserted dryly, “I am not interested in a future life. I’m entirely possessed by the agonizing fact that I’ve got to live this present one, whether I like it or not.”

The two women were in Phoebe’s room. Phoebe lay in her nightgown on the bed; a blue down-puff over her. Every light in her had died; every color faded; every line sagged. She looked, except for the strange dullness of her eyes—a dullness so deep and so pervasive that it was almost color—like a dead woman; dead and dried, after years of fever.

A knock came on her door. “Come!” Phoebe ordered monotonously. Mr. Martin entered.

“May I stay with you for a little while, Phoebe?” he asked gently.

“Yes, father,” Phoebe permitted civilly, “if you

won't tell me to be brave and that everything is for the best and that after a while I'll get reconciled to it. I refuse to be brave. And I think this is a rotten universe. And I never shall be reconciled to it as long as I live."

"I won't say anything, my dear child," her father said, "if you wish. Certainly none of those things. I don't at this moment think of anything I want to say, except that I'm suffering a twofold suffering—one for you and one for myself."

"Yes, I suppose you and mother *are* suffering," Phoebe agreed, in what seemed almost a polite attempt to catch their point of view. "But you can't know what it's like really. You didn't bring Phoebe-Girl into the world."

"No, Phoebe, of course we can't know exactly what you're going through," her father said. "But we can remember. You see, we lost a little son once."

"Yes, I know," Phoebe almost interrupted her father. "Mother's been telling me. It must have been awful. But I can't seem to realize it. I can't think," and her voice rose in sudden passion, "I can't think of anything but myself. I can't think of Tug. After all, he isn't her mother. He's only her father. And I can't think of the children even. Father, I'm going to ask you a question. I can't torture Tug by asking him. And then I think *you*

will tell me the truth. You always have all my life."

"Yes, Phoebe, I'll tell you the truth," her father promised. "As far as I know."

"Did she suffer much? Did it take very long for her to drown?" Phoebe drew herself upright. Her dead eyes sharpened. Her face fell into lines.

"No, Phoebe dear," her father answered. His composure broke for an instant; and his lips started to tremble. But he caught them back into the vise of his control. "I have just been talking with Dr. Bush about it. He says it takes only a little time—oh, a very little time—for a child to die under those circumstances. The suffering is very brief and not agonizing."

"I'm glad to hear that," Phoebe said dully.

"If you could see her face now," her father went on, "you would understand. It's so quiet and composed."

"I shan't look at her again." Phoebe shuddered. "I shan't go to the funeral. I'll keep in this room until it's over, and when you come back this afternoon from the grave, I don't want you to mention her to me—any of you, please."

"We won't, Phoebe," her mother promised.

There came another knock on the door. "Come!" Phoebe ordered monotonously. The door opened, and Tug entered. His face was white and his eyes swollen. But otherwise he was perfectly composed.

"How do you feel, dearest?" he questioned simply, as though he and his wife were alone.

"Well, I wish I were dead," Phoebe explained with a writhing smile. "But aside from that, I guess I'm all right. Oh, in a few days I'll be able to pretend like everybody else. But, Tug, understand me, I don't want to get up. I don't want to go to the funeral. I don't want to listen to the singing."

"You needn't, Phoebe," Tug said. "We want to do—all of us—the thing that *you* want."

"I'm glad you feel that way about it," Phoebe declared. "Tug," she questioned suddenly, "why did we have her? Why was she sent to us if she was going to be snatched back in this brutal fashion? What was the idea of making us suffer so?"

"Oh, Phoebe, how can I answer that question? I don't know. But I'm glad we had her. Those years are precious—"

Tug broke off abruptly, gnawing his lips.

"Well, I'm not glad," Phoebe maintained almost shrilly. "I would rather not have had her at all, than just for a little."

"I'll have to go downstairs now, Phoebe," Tug said gently, "unless you need me. There are all kinds of things to be attended to—telephone calls—and the children—and flowers coming—"

"Yes, of course." Phoebe admitted this with a strange air of detachment. "I'm so glad that you

can do it, Tug. I couldn't. You won't let anybody come up to see me, Tug?"

"No. I promise you that." Tug closed the door softly.

"When I think," Phoebe went on in a tone of bitter reminiscence, "that for so many years I worried for fear something would happen to Bertha-Elizabeth. She was always such a frail-looking little girl. I realize now that she was one of those delicate-seeming children who are really very strong. But it never occurred to me that anything would happen to Phoebe-Girl. Never! She's always been so well and she was always the first one to throw off any of the children's diseases that they got. Do you remember, mother, that Christmas when Keith's had a Christmas Tree on the stage and at the end of the performance, every child in the audience marched up to receive a present? When Phoebe-Girl came into the glare of the footlights—do you remember how the audience applauded? Those wonderful big eyes! And those extraordinary eyelashes! And that complexion, like cherries and milk! Oh, how beautiful she looked! How she smiled and dimpled when they applauded her! And God let that beautiful baby drown! Mother, do you mean to tell me there's any *meaning* in it?"

"Yes, Phoebe, I believe there is. Of course I don't know what it is, though."

"I guess nobody knows what it is," Phoebe said. "I'd like to see anybody have the impudence to try to explain it to me. Do you remember, mother, for how many years she said 'I are' and 'I were'? I never corrected her. She learned at school."

"Phoebe dear," her mother pleaded, "don't you think you'd better get up? I do believe it will help a little, if you occupy yourself."

"No, I shall stay here—until—until—I don't know what it is I am waiting for; but I shall stay here it until it comes."

There came a third knock on the door. "Come!" Phoebe's voice intoned metallically.

Bertha-Elizabeth entered.

Bertha-Elizabeth's face, tiny, tense, triangular, showed no signs of weeping; but she was as blanched as the white middy blouse she wore; and her eyes looked bigger and darker than usual. "Mother dear," she said, "Cousin Lora has just come. She would like to arrange the flowers, if you want her to. I thought I would ask you what you wanted. I would much prefer to do it myself, if you'd trust me enough to let me. Please, mother!"

Her mother did not answer. But she continued to look at her daughter. For an instant there was a faint light, as of inquiry, in her face. Very simply Bertha-Elizabeth answered that light. "The garden is full of red roses—red, *red* roses. And Phoebe-

Girl loved red roses best. You know, mother, she always loved red flowers—and hair ribbons—and belts and tams—everything red. Mother, do you remember how she *always* insisted on having a Red-Riding-Hood cape?"

Phoebe did not answer her daughter. But she continued to look with a growing intentness at her.

"We children—Tug and Edward and Cely and the twins—have been picking the red roses all the morning. And now the little ones, Micah and Marian-Elizabeth, are pulling off all the thorns. I thought, mother, if you didn't mind, Daisy and Cely and I would make a little bed of roses for Phoebe-Girl to lie on—and a coverlet to put over her—and we'd place red roses in her hands and her hair—and all about the room—— I thought we'd cover her grave with the flowers people are sending—— But I know she'd like red roses close to her—they're so warm—and she loved them so—— And, mother, do you mind—if I wrap her first in her little Red-Riding-Hood cape?"

Phoebe's eyes seemed to grow to her daughter's face.

"And, mother, we've been talking it over. Toland and Tom Connors and the twins want to carry Phoebe-Girl to the hearse and through the graveyard to her grave. We don't want anybody else but us to do it. May we, mother? Oh, mother. *mother!*"

For Phoebe had leaped out of bed, had caught Bertha-Elizabeth in her eager, trembling arms! "Oh, my darling little daughter, what beautiful ideas you have! What would I do without you! What *would* I do! Yes, we'll send Cousin Lora away and we will do everything ourselves; we'll make a great, wonderful warm coverlet of roses for Phoebe-Girl. Will you let mother help, Bertha-Elizabeth?"

"Oh, *mother!*"

And now they were weeping in each other's arms.

"Well, of course, mother," Phoebe was saying, "I've not gotten over it yet. I'm in perfect condition physically—"

"I never saw you looking better," her mother interpolated.

"And of course—mentally—I'm more serene. But I don't suppose I shall ever get over it entirely."

"No, Phoebe," her mother assured her. "You'll never get over it *entirely*. You musn't expect that."

"I don't," Phoebe said. "But it isn't such a bitter, tearing pain now. It's only a—a—a constant ache. And then, of course, now there's my hope—my great, great hope—"

Phoebe's eyes grew dreamy. It was late in October, and the Warburton family had come back from a summer outing in Maine which had been prolonged later than ever before. Phoebe was as brown be-

cause of swimming, canoeing, her almost forgotten tennis even, as was possible for a blonde to be. Out of this tan coloring, her eyes seemed almost glad again; and her hair more incisive in its effect of a carved shining metal. Her gay smile was beginning to reappear. And those sudden rushes of vivacity, which carried her and her companions to high peaks of enthusiasm, reappeared occasionally in her conversation.

She arose now and walked a little aimlessly over to the bureau; opened the bureau drawer; glanced unseeingly at its contents; shut it. The room was still a little stark. The family had arrived that afternoon and although in preparation for them, Mrs. Martin had made the house as normal as possible, many of the details of use-and-wont living were still absent.

"I'm going to have this room all done over," Phoebe remarked. "Pink and blue this time. I've always had yellow, of course. But with this baby—"

"Oh, Phoebe," Mrs. Martin burst out. "How happy it makes me—the thought of another baby! What an ocean of love a baby brings with it into this world. It seems as though I couldn't wait! My arms ache for it!"

Phoebe gave her mother a long look. "And I guess you know how my arms feel— Oh, I look

back to the *very day*, last June, when you and I were talking on the piazza——”

“*Don’t*, Phoebe!” her mother begged.

“Don’t be afraid, mother, I shan’t cry. I have myself in perfect control now. But I was only going to say—that that *very day*, I said to you that my family was big enough; that five children were enough. But I’ve learned better now. No number of children is enough—with Death always camping on our trail. Mother, I am going to have just as many children as I can. I’m never going to stop.”

Mrs. Martin sighed. “Well, of course nothing makes me happier than the birth of a grandchild. And yet, Phoebe, I don’t want you to give your whole youth up to——”

“What else am I good for?” Phoebe demanded. “Here I am a great, husky she-creature with a good husband and a comfortable home. I take child-bearing easily. I bear healthy and—if I do say it as shouldn’t—beautiful children. I not only love my children but I enjoy them. Why shouldn’t I keep on having them?”

“You’re absolutely right, Phoebe dear,” her mother answered impulsively.

“But I don’t suppose I shall ever look forward to any other as I’m looking forward to this one,” Phoebe admitted. “I’m sure she’ll fill Phoebe-

Girl's place." Phoebe stopped and gave her mother a second long look.

Mrs. Martin said nothing.

"Of course, I'm hoping and praying that she'll be the image of Phoebe-Girl. I remember just exactly what Phoebe-Girl looked like when she was born. She was the most beautiful baby I've ever seen. Do you remember, mother, how much hair she had? And her eyes, so big and soft! And her wonderful skin! She was not the least bit pink. She was just as white and lovely as a snow child—— I remember I gave the nurse a list of telephone numbers and told her to call up all those women and tell them that Mrs. Warburton wanted them to come up *that very day* and see a baby that looked exactly the way she ought to when she came walking into this world. And they all came. And do you remember, mother, when she was christened three weeks later, I tied her hair out of her eyes with a smashing, great white bow? Oh, how often I think of that picture." Phoebe stopped, but her look was all question. Mrs. Martin said nothing.

"Oh, if only, this time, the nurse would put another baby into my arms just like that—black-haired, black-eyed—white skin—dimples—Then I shall know that my lost Phoebe-Girl's place has been filled. I shall feel as though Phoebe-Girl were back. I shall not mourn her any more."

Phoebe stopped; but her silence maintained her aspect of question and she gave her mother a third long look. But Mrs. Martin did not answer.

"Yes, Tug darling," Phoebe said. "The instant the children come home, let them come right up. I want to see their faces the first time they see the baby. Warn them that they can't stay very long and tell them to be very quiet."

"Is it all right, nurse?" Tug asked anxiously of the tall, soldierly, gray-haired woman standing at the foot of the bed.

"Perfectly," the nurse answered. "Mrs. Warburton is as well as she could be under the circumstances."

"All right," Tug said. "They're already home. I'll collect them at once."

Phoebe lay in the middle of her big bed. Her hair parted in the middle and flowing into two rippling braids, one in front of each ear, gave her a look of belated girlhood—a childlikeness even. The room had been done over, according to her promise, in chintzes of pale pink and blue. The Colonial bed had been recanopied in pink and blue. Great bunches of roses and forget-me-nots filled vases everywhere. Phoebe's bed-jacket was of blue chiffon over pink. The puff was pink and blue. Out of all this delicate coloring shone two white spots: Phoebe's face pale,

a little sharp; and another face, tiny, perceptibly blond, that lay sleeping at her breast. Presently, outside, tiptoeing footsteps came stealing upstairs; drew nearer along the hall. A faint knock nicked the silence, forced open the door. There appeared Bertha-Elizabeth, a silvery radiance shining behind her tear-swept lashes; Toland, subdued, even to hair and teeth and freckles; Edward, superior as a pale young prince though frankly curious; Micah, a little perfunctory.

"Come here, my darlings, and see your new little sister," Phoebe called gently. "I'll let you kiss her when she wakes up."

The quartette filed over to her side, lined up at the bed-edge; solemnly surveyed the little egg-shaped head with its pale down of hair.

"Oh, mother, what a darling!" exclaimed Bertha-Elizabeth. "Oh, nurse, when she wakes up, may I hold her in my arms?"

"Yes," the nurse assented. "And you can help me give her a bath tomorrow if you'd like."

"Oh, nurse—thank you! Mother, how *sweet* you look! May Cely see her take her bath?"

"Yes," the nurse permitted.

"What's her name, mother?" Toland asked. "You know you wouldn't tell us what you were going to call her."

"Yes, that was a secret," Phoebe admitted, "be-

cause if it had been a boy—— But I knew it would be a girl. Her name is Hope. She's mother's hope, you see? What do you think of her, boys?"

"I think she's great," Toland said, after a period of careful examination.

Phoebe smiled with a swift rush of her old-time spirit.

"And you, Edward?"

Edward palpably struggled with his conscience. "I guess she's all right; but I *did* think she'd be bigger and all finished," he said in a disappointed tone. "And of course, I wanted a brother. I would have liked twin brothers—like Edward and Gordon." He transferred his long-lashed, great-irised gray gaze from the baby's head to his mother's face. His disappointment welled in his look.

Phoebe laughed outright this time. "Aside from that, she's all right," she summed it up for him. "What do you think, Micah?"

"I thought she'd be ready to go right out and play. I really don't think she's very *useful*."

The baby waked up; emitted a queer whining cry. True to her promise, the nurse permitted Bertha-Elizabeth to hold her a moment, to soothe her back to sleep. Then she put the baby in the crib and tip-toeing, the children departed.

Phoebe dozed. "Is that my mother?" she asked when the next nursing period came round.

"Yes, Mrs. Martin has been here quite a while."

"I'd like to speak to my mother, nurse. I'm so rested, and I feel just like it."

"I'll tell her," the nurse assented briskly.

She departed.

Phoebe's gray eyes wandered absently out the window over the garden, still stiff with ice, and beyond to the marshes like planes of silver, and beyond them to the surrounding hills, snow-covered. A blue sky, taut as a pulled blue canvas, dropped low onto those hills. A file of evergreens, epauletted with snow, charged to their top. Great white clouds with sails bellying roundly sailed massively above them. In the fireplace a wood fire snapped and sparkled. Phoebe stared dreamily at the mounting flames. Then her eyes returned to the little suckling, grunting creature. She smiled happily. Presently the door opened; Mrs. Martin entered.

"Well, Phoebe dear, how do you feel?" she demanded briskly of her daughter.

"Perfectly *ripping!*" Phoebe said with something of her old italicizing forthrightness. "I never had an easier time. It was a picnic as far as I was concerned. She just seemed to walk into this world, as though a little gate in heaven opened and let her out. And I seemed to stand off and watch the proceeding."

"She's an angel, anyway!" Mrs. Martin seemed to authenticate this impression.

"Yes, she certainly is that." Phoebe looked down again at her busy little daughter. "The little pig. Of course she doesn't look the least bit like Phoebe-Girl—— But not, after all, that that makes any difference, I guess. I found out something, the instant they brought her to me. And that was that, although she made her own place in my heart at once, she can't—and *nobody* can—fill Phoebe-Girl's place. I don't know that I make myself clear, mother?"

"I understand, Phoebe. I do understand—oh, so well. I could have told you, and I wanted to; but somehow I couldn't. When you spoke of a new baby filling Phoebe-Girl's place, I knew better. When you were born, I thought you were going to fill little Albert's place. But you didn't. You couldn't. That place is vacant in my heart still. Only now, there's a something sweet and lovely about it. It doesn't hurt any more."

"Why is that, I wonder?" Phoebe asked patiently. "I don't understand it. I don't believe I shall ever feel that way."

"Yes, you will, Phoebe. It takes time, but it comes. And this is the way it will happen. Your other children keep changing all the time. You hardly get to know them in one stage before they jump into another. And oh, how it hurts you to see them growing up and then, after a while, passing

beyond your influence and almost out of your life. I remember when it first dawned on me that I never again was going to see you as a little girl or Ernest as a little boy, how my heart ached! That period is so sweet when you are their entire world, and their happiness springs from you. And their darling little ways! And their lovely little language! It's scarcely here before it's gone forever. *And, Phoebe, you never can get it back.* It's as though each child was a series of children—like those strings of paper dolls you used to cut when you were a child. Only as fast as each new phase appears, the last one dies. *And, Phoebe, you never can get it back.* My little Albert died. Where he is I don't know. But he's somewhere, I'm sure. And he stayed in my memory as he was. He never grew into another child. I still think he needs me more than anybody. You came—and oh, how I loved you! Ernest came—and oh, how I loved him! Yet every year, every month—every minute, you might say—you changed into other children. But Albert was dead. He stayed as he was. I feel as though I'd kept him all those years. I don't think of Albert now as a sorrow or a tragedy. He's a little nest egg of happiness, saved up Somewhere in the universe for me. And some time, I know, I'm going to find that happiness and enjoy it, as I never could enjoy it in this life."

CHAPTER VI

THE ETERNAL SANTA CLAUS

"WELL, mother," Phoebe exclaimed from the door of her mother's living room, "I've got bad news for you."

Perhaps Mrs. Martin was accustomed to an alarmist quality in her daughter; perhaps she considered that a certain inobvious luster of spirit contradicted the obvious pessimism of her utterance. At any rate she glanced quietly up at Phoebe and as quietly glanced back at her sewing. "What is it?" she asked evenly.

"We're going away for Christmas this year—Tug and I and the children. We're so placed that we can't do anything different. We're going up to Tug's Uncle Jerry's farm in Braeburn, New Hampshire."

"Isn't it rather sudden?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Yes. You see Uncle Jerry has written every December inviting the whole family up there. But it has never been convenient before, and besides we've always wanted our own Christmas in our own house. And again, they've always had a big party

and didn't need us so much. But this year he wrote such a pathetic letter! He's getting pretty infirm now. He hasn't been out for months, and they're going to be alone. He said he would like to have one good *family* Christmas in the old homestead before he died."

"How does Tug feel about it?" Mrs. Martin inquired.

"He's as excited as— You see, he used to go to Braeburn for Christmas when he was a little boy, and he always had the most wonderful times. Last night he gathered the children about him and told them all about the things he used to do. There's a hill in front of the farmhouse where he used to coast—so steep that—well, Tug says it's the most dangerous coasting that he's ever done. And then back of the barn there's a great big pond where he went skating. He fell through the ice once and was nearly drowned. Tug says they were always so good to him. He particularly wants to go when they need him because it would be like paying back an old debt."

"How did the children take it?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"They're simply crazy with delight. Of course they never saw a real country Christmas before. Oh, I do so hope it will snow."

"I hope so, too," Mrs. Martin agreed. Her eyes

went out the window to the early December scene, brown tree-trunks and tree-branches criss-crossing on the blue sky; brown paths weaving among brown flower-beds; faded lawns. "I must confess I like snow on the ground in winter, especially in the country. The earth looks so naked when the grass and flowers are gone."

"Of course, at first," Phoebe said meditatively, "I hated to go away and leave you and father. But when I saw how much Tug wanted to do it—he says nobody has ever been kinder to him than his Uncle Jerry—"

"I'm glad you're going then," Mrs. Martin approved, "and I think you ought to."

"That's the way I feel about it," Phoebe affirmed. "Then there's another side of it. I'm glad to get away from Maywood—just for the rest it will give me. Do you know, mother, I'm rather tired of Christmas. It's such *hard work*."

"I don't wonder," her mother said. "When I consider what you do—a Christmas tree and a Christmas dinner, all the presents you give and all the cards you send out, the constant excitement in the house, with everybody coming in to see the Tree, and the children going out to see everybody else's Tree—I should think you would be worn out."

"I am, almost," Phoebe admitted.

"Christmas has become so elaborate nowadays,"

Mrs. Martin sighed. "The dinner in courses and so many of them, the tree lighted by electricity, and all the special things you get, special boxes to put presents in, and special paper, bags and tags and cards, and cords and ribbons and seals—yes, Christmas has really become a terrible strain."

"The queerest thing has happened to me this year," Phoebe declared in a puzzled tone. "And I can't for the life of me account for it. All my life I've been simply *mad* about Christmas. From the first of December on, I've never thought of anything else. But the last two or three years, it's grown to be such a burden—I've sort of dreaded it. And this year I can't feel Christmas-sy to save my life. We'll bring the children's presents up to Braeburn and we'll let them hang their stockings up—Tug says there are beautiful, great old-fashioned fireplaces there. But no tree, no Santa Claus, no elaborate Christmas dinner, no eggnog—no anything that is tiresome. I'm going to rest."

"That's right," her mother approved. "Of course I shall miss you and the children dreadfully. And yet, do you know, I shall enjoy having a quiet Christmas too. How I wish we could go back to the simplicity of years ago! People spend so much money nowadays and they rush round so. Seems as though it could be done in some better way."

"Some people would like to abolish Christmas

altogether," Phoebe went on thoughtfully, "but I don't think I'm for that; I don't believe in *useless* giving and I try to do my Christmas shopping early. But yet, when I consider giving it up *altogether* something happens in my heart. I just *can't*. Sometimes I think there is something in people that makes them yearn for the things they're accustomed to, like holidays. The trouble is, as you say, that it's no longer simple enough. Christmas has become standardized and commercialized. We go through the *motions* of Christmas just as mechanically as we went through our exercises in school."

"So you see, Edward," Mrs. Martin concluded, after she had recounted this conversation to her husband, "this means that we will have our Christmas dinner alone. I hope you won't mind. Just think, we've gone to Phoebe's ever since she's been married."

"No, I won't mind," Mr. Martin declared. "Of course I'll miss the children and the grandchildren. But aside from that, I don't know but that it will be rather refreshing to have a Christmas like the ones we used to have when we first went to housekeeping."

"I think so too," Mrs. Martin agreed. "I'm kinder looking forward to it. Land, how quiet they used to be! We were so poor then that I counted every penny. Do you remember that we had Sam

and Lou Davis to our first dinner? How simple it was! Only turkey and vegetables and a plum pudding! And all the vegetables set right down on the table. When I think of Phoebe's dinner served in courses—and with three maids to wait on table—I realize what a difference there is in living nowadays. Lou Davis gave me a handkerchief-case that she'd embroidered herself. She did perfectly beautiful work. I remember I felt so cheap because I gave her—now, what was it I gave her—what *was* it? Well, I can't remember. But I know I made it myself on the machine. I couldn't embroider the way Lou did. In those days Christmas giving was simpler, although perhaps folks put more of themselves into it. I remember after dinner how beautifully Lou sang to us. She had a lovely voice—she'd have made her fortune on the stage. And she used to sing those old songs, 'Oh, How I Love My Ada!' 'Climbing Up the Golden Stairs,' and 'In the Gloaming.' Oh yes, Christmas was so much more happy then."

She paused as if expecting some comment from Mr. Martin. But all he said was, "Well, this year Christmas will have a chance to revert to type with us."

"Who do you suppose came into the office this morning?" Mr. Martin demanded of his wife a

week later. "Oh, you'll never guess!" he warned her. "Not in a hundred years. Sam Davis!" he finally answered her interlocutory stare.

"*Sam Davis!*" Mrs. Martin echoed. "*Sam Davis!* Well, of all things! Why, we were talking about him only the other night!"

"That's what I told him," Mr. Martin replied. "He'd just come from the West. He's come on East about a machine he's invented. He's an inventor, you know! He's had a pretty hard row to hoe. I guess he's practically at the end of his rope. He said if this machine doesn't go—but he seems to be sure it will, and I must say, it sounded pretty good to me. Well, he said that he and his wife got talking about that Christmas dinner they had with us nearly forty years ago and that put it into his head to look me up. He said his wife used that catch-all you gave her until it was worn to rags."

"Oh, *that's* it—a *catch-all*," Mrs. Martin said with a gratified accent. "I've been trying ever since I mentioned it to remember what I gave Lou Davis. Did you tell him I spoke of the handkerchief-case she gave me?"

"Well, I told him you'd mentioned something, but I couldn't think what it was. We had a long talk—Sam went to lunch with me. He's the same fine, open-hearted fellow that he's always been. And—and—I might as well break it to you, Bertha—I don't

know what you'll say to me. But it's good-by to your quiet Christmas; I invited them to Christmas dinner here."

"I'm glad you did! I'm glad you *did*," said Mrs. Martin with emphasis. "I'm just as glad as I can be. I'd love to see Lou again. I'll go in and call on her tomorrow."

"You can't do that, because they're leaving for New York to be gone until Christmas morning. I said we'd have dinner at eight o'clock at night. Is that all right? There was something Sam had to do Christmas day, so he couldn't get out here at noon."

"Yes—I don't know but what I like it better at night. It gives me more time to get ready. Phoebe always has her dinners at night."

"Oh, and, Bertha," Mr. Martin went on in an apologetic tone, "I did another thing. You know Rogers in the office? Well, I found out that he wasn't going to have any Christmas dinner this year. So I invited him. He's all alone in the world, you know. That niece of his, the one he brought up from babyhood, got married last year and went to Seattle to live."

"That's all right, Edward," Mrs. Martin said heartily. "I'm glad you did. I've always liked Mr. Rogers. I shall enjoy having him here."

"All right, I'll phone Sam early tomorrow all the dope about trains."

"Well, Edward," Mrs. Martin said two days later, "I don't know what you are going to think of me. But I got a letter from Cousin Debbie today, saying how tired and worn out she was—she's been sewing six mortal weeks at the Harrisons' trousseau—and on the impulse I dropped her a postcard, telling her to come down and spend Christmas with us. She'd just love to see Lou Davis again. Those two were always the greatest trainers when they got together—Lou's just as full as she can *stick*, you know. And then in the afternoon Mrs. Seaver came over. And it seems Gracie's going away to spend Christmas with Ray's people, and she'll be all alone. So I invited her to dinner. I hope you don't mind?"

"Go as far as you like," Mr. Martin encouraged his wife. "It happens that that makes the number even. Because coming out on the train tonight, I had a talk with Brad Torrey and I ended by inviting him. I don't know when I've talked with Brad before. I thought his life was just filled with dissipation, but it seems he leads quite a lonely existence nowadays. Queer about those gay boys! There comes a period when all the gaiety goes and then they are nothing but stranded old bachelors, too young for

their own generation and too old for the next. Brad's just reached that period. Lord, how I used to envy him! Seemed as though at one time he was always going to dinners and riding in other folk's carriages. Well, the long and short of it all is, that nobody had invited him to Christmas dinner, so I did. You see that makes the crowd even—eight of us."

"It's getting to be quite a party," Mrs. Martin said, shaking her hands in her characteristic gesture of delight. "Of course, I'm going to have it as quiet and simple as possible. But I do want the house to look pretty. So I stopped into Bradley's today and ordered some holly and mistletoe; oh yes, and some wreaths for the windows, a kind I've always wanted, big laurel ones with smashing red bows. They were expensive, Edward."

"Darn the expense!" Mr. Martin commented. "But above all things I want you to have a good dinner, Bertha. Don't think of economizing. If you need extra help, get it. It seems the Davises are just longing for some home-cooked New England food."

"Oh yes, I've been planning my dinner ever since you told me they were coming," Mrs. Martin declared. "I'm going to copy Phoebe's Christmas dinner. We're going to begin with grape fruit—great big ones. Then I'm going to have a cream of spinach soup with whipped cream on the top; then

mushrooms on toast—real mushrooms, not canned—then the turkey with all the vegetables, sweet and white potatoes, squash, turnip, celery, onions; then a romaine salad with grapes and nuts, and French dressing; then plum pudding and mince pie; ice cream; cheese, coffee and fruit. With olives and candy and nuts, seems to me that'll be a pretty good dinner."

" Sounds like some feed to me," Mr. Martin approved. " Won't it be a lot of work? "

" Yes, but I want to do it. I don't know what you'll think of me, Edward," Mrs. Martin went on, " but these are positively the *last* people I'm going to ask because our table won't hold any more. I couldn't resist inviting Mr. and Mrs. Merriweather. You see, they're all alone here in this country, and the English do make so much of Christmas, and two more didn't seem to make any difference——"

" I'm glad you did it," Mr. Martin said heartily. " I like Merriweather. He's a nice fellow. He's lived in the West, too. He and Sam will have a lot in common."

" Oh, say, Bertha," Mr. Martin began two nights later. " Davis came into the office today. He'd come on from New York on the midnight and was going back on the midnight. He's put that deal through and he's feeling pretty good. We got talking about the Christmas dinner, and I don't know

exactly how it happened—I think he proposed it. Anyway, we went around to a department store and bought a whole lot of fool toys as presents for the dinner party. I haven't had such a good time in months. I wish you could have heard Sam Davis josh those pretty girls who waited on us. Crowded as it was, the whole department was listening to him before we got out."

"Did you buy something for *everybody*?" Mrs. Martin demanded.

"I should say we did. We must have got half a dozen for everybody. We nearly bought the toy department out. And then Sam and I went round to Miner's and he bought a wrist watch for his wife. It seems she wants one awfully. They'd made an agreement not to make each other presents, but he wants you to put it at her place on the table." He drew a little white, paper-wrapped box from his pocket. "He said you might look at it if you wanted to." Mr. Martin undid the paper, opened the box. "Like it?" he asked.

"Oh, I think it's an awfully pretty one!" Mrs. Martin exclaimed. "It's much nicer than Phoebe's. I like it square. I think Phoebe's is too masculine. And I like that elastic gold bracelet. I've got a great joke on Sam too. A package and a letter came from Lou today. She'd bought a new camera for Sam, and she wanted me to put that at *his* plate."

"I went into town this afternoon," Mrs. Martin confided to Mr. Martin, when he came home to dinner Christmas Eve, "in all this storm and did a little shopping. When you told me that you and Sam Davis had bought all those toys, I thought it would be a little more like Christmas if I did them up pretty. So I got a lot of lovely Christmas paper—some gold, and some red—and some green Christmas ribbon and cord and cards and tags and seals. I've been working all the afternoon just doing up bundles. It's been great fun, and I didn't get tired at all. Somehow when you have such pretty materials to work with and all you want of them——" Mrs. Martin led her husband into the living-room. "Look at that!" The capacious couch was piled high with Christmas bundles.

"Great Scott! I didn't know that we bought so much truck," said Mr. Martin.

"Now what do you suppose I'm going to do this evening?" Mrs. Martin demanded. "You'll never guess. The idea came to me while I was in town. I bought some cretonne and braid, and I'm going to make Lou Davis a catch-all, as near as I can remember like the one I made her forty years ago."

After dinner, Mrs. Martin retired to the back living-room, where for the whole evening she busied herself at the sewing machine. Mr. Martin distrib-

uted his attention impartially among the evening newspapers and the Christmas magazines.

"Well!" Mrs. Martin finally broke three hours of silent sewing, "that's done! What time is it?"

"Half-past eleven!" Mr. Martin informed her. "Let's go to bed."

"Edward," Mrs. Martin said slowly, "I've been thinking of something as I sat here. And I want you to say yes. I know you'll think I'm a fool but, oh, you don't know how much I'd like to do it."

"Shoot!" Mr. Martin ordered with calmness.

"I'd like to have a Christmas Tree." Before her husband could object, Mrs. Martin rushed into explanation. "You see, with all those presents—We can't put them on the table, they're too big and bulky—And then a Christmas Tree *looks* so pretty."

"Will the stores be open tomorrow?" Mr. Martin asked.

"I don't know. But I thought some of them might still be open. Phoebe left the key of her house with me and I know just where she keeps the Christmas Tree trimmings. I thought that I could go over there early tomorrow and get them. I'll have plenty of time to dress the Tree in the afternoon. Would you mind walking down to the Centre now, just on the chance that the stores aren't all closed?"

"In this storm!" Mr. Martin ejaculated.

"It's stopped snowing," Mrs. Martin pleaded.
"It isn't so very far."

"All right," Mr. Martin agreed suddenly.

"Oh, I'm so glad it stormed!" Mrs. Martin exclaimed as they came into the yard. "Phoebe will be so delighted. The children want to do just the things Tug did when he was a boy at Uncle Jerry's. Besides Christmas doesn't really seem like Christmas without snow.

It had been a heavy storm. The snow lay everywhere in great unbroken drifts. And in the sky, like the reflections of it, lay drifts, almost as thick, of cloud. There was no moon, but in the wide black cloud-rifts were piled stars that dropped a brilliant glitter on a world, already frost-silvered.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin passed through a street which held twin rows of holiday celebrations. In many houses, curtains were up displaying Christmas Trees that had become cones solid with gleam and color. The main street into which they presently turned was more reticent. The few big old family mansions sat back behind shrouding shrubbery, and the group of stores at the end did not emit a ray of light.

"Everything seems to be closed up tight as a drum," Mr. Martin commented. "I'm afraid you'll have to go without your tree."

"Well, keep on," Mrs. Martin persisted.

"Maybe O'Brien will be open. Let's cross over and see. There's a chance he will be working late. No, I'm afraid he's gone home. Sometimes he—*Edward!* What are those things lying in the street? For the land's sake, they're *Christmas Trees!* Why, how did they come here? Oh, I know what's happened! O'Brien's cleaned his shop up, ready for the day after Christmas, and thrown away all the trees he hasn't sold. We can take any one we want. Now, let's look them all over."

Mrs. Martin finally made her selection; but only after Mr. Martin had lifted upright every tree on the street. Her choice was a sapling, thick and round at the base but tapering to a delicate slimness. Mr. Martin seized it by the thick end, Mrs. Martin by the slim one. They proceeded back through the snow.

"*Edward,*" Mrs. Martin exclaimed suddenly, "would you mind if I stopped at Phoebe's now and got that box of Christmas trimmings? It will save me the trip tomorrow. I can carry it perfectly well under my other arm."

"No, of course I don't mind," Mr. Martin said patiently, "only it seems rather foolish. We can go around there tomorrow morning so much easier. And you don't need it till then."

"I would like to get it now—ever so much, *Edward,*" Mrs. Martin pleaded humbly.

"All right," Mr. Martin gave way. "But we can't get in," he added hopefully.

"I—I brought the key," Mrs. Martin faltered.

Mr. Martin laughed. "Framed on me, did you?" he accused his wife.

"Well," Mr. Martin said fifteen minutes later, as he sat the tree up in the big window of the living-room, "one thing I'm glad of—it's got a stand. I don't have to make one for you. Now, let's go to bed."

"You go to bed, Edward," Mrs. Martin coaxed. "I'm going to stay up a little while."

"What under the canopy are you going to do now?" Mr. Martin demanded.

"Trim the Christmas Tree," Mrs. Martin confessed. "Now don't try to dissuade me. I'm *going* to do it. I feel just like it. You go to bed—you're tired."

"All right," Mr. Martin said with a surprising degree of resignation, "but I'm not so very tired. I guess I'll stay up and help you."

"You're wanted on the telephone, Mrs. Martin," one of the maids said towards the close of the Christmas dinner.

"All right. Keep those doors closed, Annie. I shan't be able to hear a word with all this hullabaloo." Mrs. Martin went into the hall and took up

the receiver. "Hello! Hello!" she called into it.

"Hello, is that you, mother?" Phoebe's voice answered.

"Yes, Merry Christmas, Phoebe!"

"Merry Christmas to you and father! I've been trying to get you all day, but I couldn't do it until now. This is my Christmas present to myself—a long-distance talk with you. I was afraid you'd be lonely and I was afraid you'd think I would be lonely. But I haven't been—Mother, I've had one of the most wonderful Christmases I've ever had in my life. In the first place, Uncle Jerry is a perfect darling—the sweetest, gentlest, kindest little old man you ever saw, and Aunt Louise is just as fascinating, the prettiest, dearest, *duckiest* little old lady. All little bobbing curls and pink cheeks, and the *tiniest* hands and feet. Well, do you know, after we got up here and we saw how quiet the house was—Uncle Jerry almost bed-ridden—Tug and I decided that we were going to make a regular Christmas for them. I told Aunt Louise that if it would be a help to her, I'd just love to get up the Christmas dinner. When she saw that I really was crazy to do it, she admitted that she'd love to eat a dinner that somebody else had cooked. She told me she couldn't remember when she'd had a meal in anybody else's house. So yesterday Tug and I motored over to Akron and I bought the stuff for one of my

regular Christmas dinners—you know, what I always have, grapefruit, cream of spinach with whipped cream floating on it, mushrooms on toast, and turkey with all the vegetables, romaine salad, with grapes and nuts—plum pudding——”

“Yes, I know,” Mrs. Martin interpolated.

“Well, I turned Aunt Louise right out of the kitchen, and if you can believe it, I cooked that entire dinner myself. Of course Eliza, Aunt Louise’s maid, and Bertha-Elizabeth helped. If I do say it as shouldn’t, it was *some dinner*. Tug says if I wasn’t his wife, he’d offer me a job as his cook any day. I can’t tell you how Aunt Louise and Uncle Jerry enjoyed it! And I served everything in as fancy a way as I knew how. I scooped the grapefruit out of the shell and scalloped the edges—awfully hard work——”

“I know,” Mrs. Martin interrupted. “I’ve been doing it myself.”

“But that isn’t half of it,” Phoebe went on, unheeding. “Tug learned that Uncle Jerry was dying to hear some Christmas music. You see, there’s no way that he can hear any music nowadays. So, what do you think Tug did? He hired the best church-choir in Akron to come over here Christmas eve and serenade Uncle Jerry. They agreed to be here promptly at nine. And just as the clock struck, I opened one of the windows at the top. They began

singing Christmas carols the instant they turned into the drive. You have no idea how wonderful it sounded—beginning way off—very faint—in the distance and then coming nearer and nearer and getting louder and louder with the sleigh-bells making sort of a gay accompaniment. And if you could have seen Uncle Jerry prick up his ears! And how his eyes shone when it dawned upon him what was happening! Of course I had made hot coffee and sandwiches for the choir. And they all came in and sang around the piano for nearly an hour."

"I'd admire to have heard that," Mrs. Martin said.

"That's not half the story," Phoebe sped on. "Tug and I made up our minds on the way home from Akron that we'd got to have a Christmas tree—— We found there wasn't a tree to be bought in Braeburn. So what do you think we did? While the children were busy coasting, Tug and I went out in the woods and *chopped a tree down*. We had the greatest time manoeuvering so's to get it in the back way without anybody seeing it. Tug had to make a frame for it to stand in and—well, you know how much of a carpenter Tug is! I only hope the Recording Angel didn't hear his language. Then late at night, after all those choir people had left and everybody else had gone to bed, downstairs we came and trimmed that tree. We hadn't been able to get

any Christmas trimmings in Braeburn—only candles—and so what do you suppose we did? We got Eliza to string cranberries and popcorn. And that was all there was on that tree except tufts of cotton-wool and candles and confetti. But it looked lovely. I wished you could have seen everybody's face when we led them into the parlor after breakfast. The children were simply crazy about the tree—they'd always had their trees lighted by electricity. It was so different from any that they had ever seen. Aunt Louise said she was going to keep it standing the whole year. I've called you up partly to tell you that this is what became of my quiet, simple Christmas. *Quiet!* I never worked so hard in all my life. Just think—I made the coffee and sandwiches Christmas eve! After midnight I trimmed the tree. This morning I cooked the Christmas dinner. Oh, another thing that delighted Aunt Louise! I had slipped an evening dress in my suitcase—you know my pink *crêpe de chine* with all that glittery rhinestone trimming—and I put it on for dinner. Aunt Louise said nobody had ever worn such a beautiful dress in her house. I've never spent a happier Christmas anywhere. And somehow, notwithstanding how I've worked, I feel rested. I've been out of doors all the time. Tug and I have skated and coasted with the children every day. Tug says he never was so surprised in all his life to find out how that hill in front

of the house had shrunk. It's really only a *mound* and he said he remembered it as almost a mountain. As for the lake back of the barn, it isn't a lake at all. It isn't a *pond* even. It's a pondlet. But oh, what fun we've had skating on it!"

"And of course the children are having a wonderful time," Mrs. Martin commented.

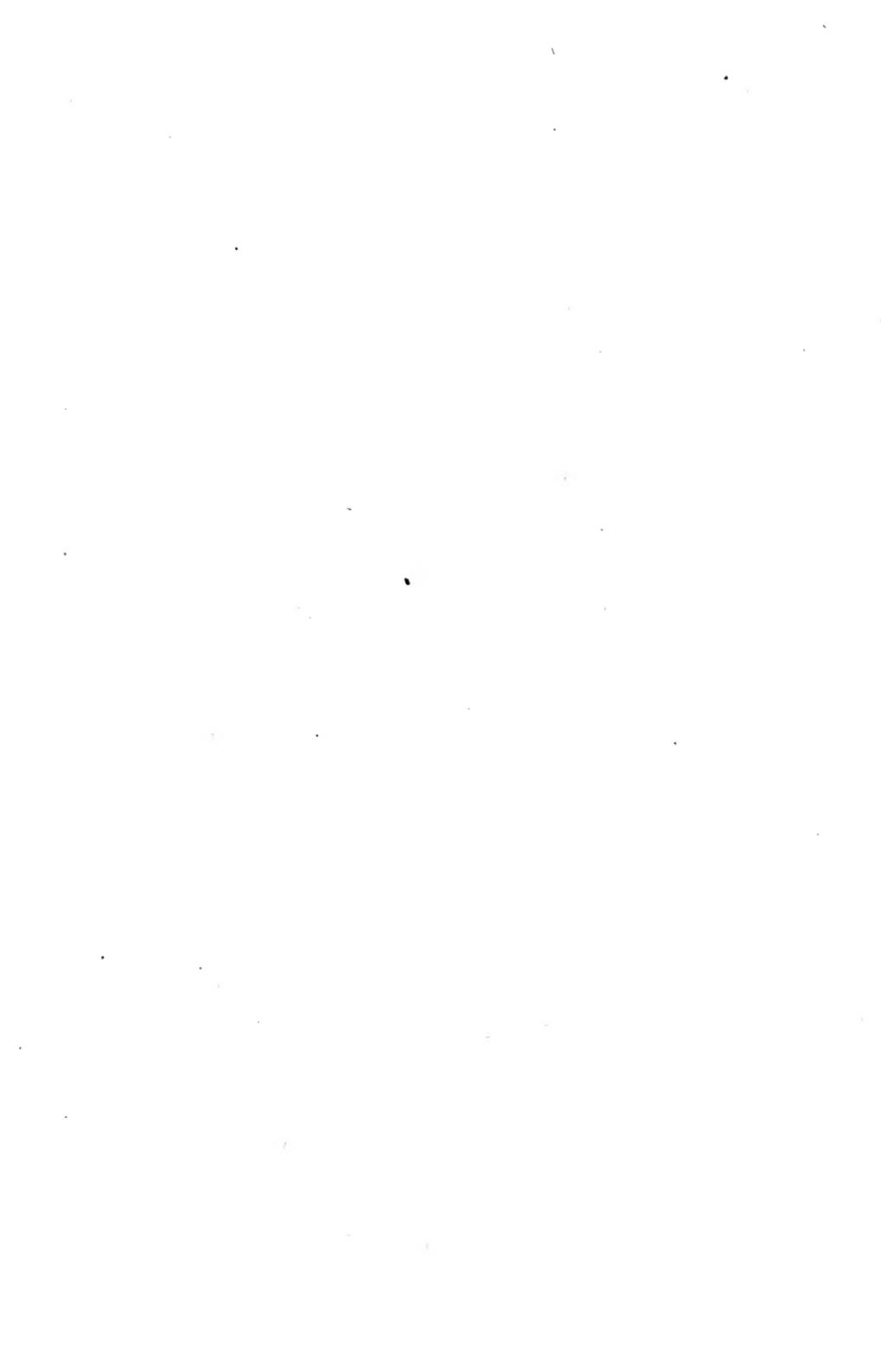
"You should see them. Bertha-Elizabeth has such pink cheeks and eyes like stars! Sometimes I think she's going to be pretty, after all. Toland has been driving a pung ever since he got here; morning, noon, and night! And as for Edward and Micah—they are coasting or skating every moment. They've made a whole family of snow men and women. I've never seen my children more happy. If only Phoebe-Girl were here——"

"You may be sure she's having her Christmas too," Mrs. Martin's voice lowered to the deepest depth of tender certainty. "Is Hope all right?"

"Sleeps like a little top. And cheeks—mother, her cheeks are like cherries. And—I don't know what's caused it—maybe it's the cold; but her hair has crisped up into the loveliest fine ringlets. It's like spun glass."

"I'm so glad your visit's turned out so well." Mrs. Martin's voice arose to its brisk normal tone.

"I hope, mother darling," Phoebe resumed, "that you and father haven't been too lonely. I've really





"What a racket those people are making!"

felt wicked enjoying myself so much when you—
What's that music I hear and all that laughing?"

"It's the victrola your father gave me for Christmas," Mrs. Martin exclaimed. "And it's playing a medley of old songs—songs that you've never heard, 'Oh, How I Love My Ada!' 'In the Gloaming,' 'Up-I-Dee,' 'Over the Garden Wall.'" She called away from the telephone: "Please shut the door, Annie. Your father gave me a beautiful wrist-watch, Phoebe, too—just like one—Oh, I've been far from lonely, Phoebe. We've had the most lovely Christmas. In the first place we invited some old friends to dinner. Do you remember ever hearing me mention Sam and Lou Davis?"

"All my life," Phoebe answered.

"Well, they happened to be in Boston—
(Please shut the door, and keep it shut, Annie!)
What a racket those people are making! Can you
hear me, Phoebe?"

"Yes, mother," Phoebe answered, "are you having a party?"

Mrs. Martin proceeded in dashes of narrative that for conciseness and speed might have been Phoebe's own compressed phraseology. The door, opening and shutting, let out roars of laughter, continued vociferous calls for Mrs. Martin herself; bursts of music from the victrola—"dinner with us the first Christmas after we were married—funniest thing

you ever heard of—Lou embroidered a handkerchief-case for me exactly like the one she gave me then—a cretonne catch-all, as much like the one I gave her forty years—(Yes, Debbie, I'm coming as soon as possible; I'm talking to Phoebe. *Please* shut the door!)—first thing I knew there were ten of us—just as elaborate dinner as yours—lot of it myself—scraped the grapefruit—scalloped the edges—made the pudding and pies.”

“I should think you'd be tired out, mother.”

“I suppose I'll be dead tomorrow—haven't felt so fresh and gay in years—I feel young—laughed until my sides ache—(Yes, Sam, I'll be back in a few moments, I'm talking to my daughter. Yes, if you please, close the door!)—nine courses—not a clean bit of china or silver in this house—at the last moment, just like you—decided to have a tree—lying in the snow—stopped in your house at that hour—your Christmas tree trimmings—worked till three in the morning—joke-presents—Sam and Edward had bought—drums—horns—whistles—everybody in gales of laughter—without my knowing it your father smuggled Tug's Santa Claus costume out of your house—last moment came to the table dressed as Santa Claus——”

“I bet my father looked stunning!” Phoebe said proudly.

“Yes, he—(Yes, Mrs. Seaver, I'll be there in a

jiffy. I'm talking with Phoebe. Do you mind closing the door? You're making such a racket in there, I can't hear a word Phoebe's saying.) He certainly did look stunning, Phoebe."

"What are you wearing, mother?"

"My evening dress—the gray and silver—(In just a few minutes, Mr. Torrey! You see my daughter has just long-distanced me. Yes, please close the door. It sounds as if there were a hundred of you!) —all wearing those paper caps that come out of bonbons—if you could see Lou Davis in a—she and Debbie have raised Cain ever since they got together."

"Well, mother," Phoebe declared, "I'm glad you're having such a good time. I've been revising my ideas about Christmas. I understand now what it really means. The idea of Christmas is to give. It doesn't make any difference what kind of giving it is—whether it's simple or complicated—as long as it's *real* giving. I've really never worked harder in all my life as in these last few days. But I don't mind it, because the people I did it for *needed* it so much and *enjoyed* it so much. It was real giving. I'm going to try and remember that every Christmas after this."

"I think you're right, Phoebe," her mother agreed. "If you're doing something *whole-heartedly* and especially for somebody you love—there's

no hard work about it. It's fun! (Yes, Mr. Marsh, in just one minute.) You see——”

“Mother, I'm not going to keep you here any longer, you're all together *too popular*. Besides my children are calling to me. Merry Christmas again!”

“Merry Christmas, Phoebe!” her mother answered. “Yes, Mr. Rogers, I'm coming now.”

CHAPTER VII

THE WOMAN ACROSS THE STREET

"THE old Murphy house has been let during our absence," observed Phoebe.

"Oh, you haven't *heard!*!" exclaimed Mrs. Brodbeck. "Why, that's been the sensation of the summer among the stay-at-homes."

"No, of course," Phoebe admitted indignantly. "Tug would *never* think to tell me anything interesting like that."

"The Days have taken it," Mrs. Brodbeck continued. "The Mrs. Day. You know, Phoebe, Mrs. Carl Day—you remember that scandal last year across the river?"

"Oh, I *do* remember!" said Phoebe. "I thought they left town."

"There was some talk of their going," interposed Mrs. Fall. "I don't see why they didn't, myself. What's the use of staying in a town after a thing like that? You never can live it down."

"They say *he* wanted to go," explained Mrs. Meredith. "And *she* didn't. She realized his business interests were here and his friends and every-

thing, and I guess she thought that the story would follow her wherever she went. They'd have had to live within a short distance of Maywood, anyway, and so they stayed. Perhaps she thinks she can live it down. I should have left myself."

"I don't know how I'd act in a case like that," meditated Phoebe in an uncharacteristic instant of indecision. "What would you do, mother?"

"I'd do exactly what Mrs. Day is doing," Mrs. Martin replied. "But it won't be a bed of roses for her, whatever course she takes, you may be sure of that. If I were——"

"Mother," a voice interrupted, "can I keep this puppy?"

The women turned.

It would have been difficult to say which looked the most disreputable, the boy who held the puppy in his arms, or the puppy who nestled so confidingly there. But the puppy—a blend of many breeds, concentrated into one nondescript bundle of long, matted hair and big imploring eyes—was at least intact. The boy's face was not dirty, it was encrusted. His shirtwaist was torn; one khaki trouser leg unstrapped at the knee flapped about his ankle. The other disclosed a generous tear at the stocking-knee.

"Edward Warburton!" Phoebe's voice held as much resignation as vexation. "How did you get so——"

"We've been chasing him all over the marsh—me and Freddie and Tom. Gee, mother, he was scairt of me! At first, his heart beat like—like anything! But now he's all right. He likes me. Aw, let me keep him, mother!"

Phoebe sighed. "Go right upstairs, Edward, and wash your face and hands; change your stockings. When you have done that, come down and let me see how clean you are. If you look like a human being, then you can give the puppy a bath."

"Can I keep him, mother?" Edward pleaded. "She oughtta let me, grandma, oughtn't she?" he turned to Mrs. Martin.

Mrs. Martin maintained a discreet, twinkling-eyed silence.

"I'll see," Phoebe temporized, "what he looks like after the bath and what your father says."

Edward disappeared.

Phoebe glared about the circle.

"Don't try to put it in words, Phoebe," Mrs. Meredith besought her. "Don't struggle with the inexpressible. Only let me say that we are blood sisters in emotion at this moment. Elliott came to his father last night with a little *live* alligator somebody'd given him and a proposition to raise alligators in the back yard."

"I forgot what that Day sc'jal was exactly,"

Phoebe took up their conversation finally. "Pretty awful, wasn't it?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Meredith. "Another man—"

"How long have they been here?" Phoebe interrupted.

"They moved in the first of July," Mrs. Fall answered.

"Has anybody been to call?" queried Phoebe.

"Oh *no!*!" Mrs. Brodbeck's emphasis was as forceful as it was hasty. "Naturally, nobody wants to go there."

"What does she look like?" Phoebe went on. "I've never seen her."

"She's rather a pretty little thing," Mrs. Brodbeck returned. "Blonde, fluffy, cute—dresses very smartly. She's changed a lot since this business—there's a look in her eyes—"

"What sort of a man is Carl Day?" inquired Phoebe.

"I've never seen him," answered Mrs. Fall. "But Billy knows him and likes him—they meet at the Gym. Billy says he's a fine fellow. He's older than she—quite a bit—and a little deaf."

"Well," Phoebe declared, "I should say he was either a fool or a hero." She craned her head to look again at the house across the street, as though



“What does she look like?”

now it would present a new aspect to her. "Have they any children?"

"'A gentleman or a boob' is the way Elliott puts it," Mrs. Meredith said, dimpling. "No, they have no children."

"And a great blessing, too," commented Mrs. Brodbeck.

In every possible detail, the house across the street contrasted with the ample Colonial simplicity of the house on whose piazza the five women sat. It was small and new, architecturally much cut-up. The vines, which had done their meager best in one summer's growth to cover the piazza, had, at the approach of autumn, given up the struggle; had faded and shriveled to strings of rattling green. The mats of nasturtiums, however, which bordered the stone foundation of the house, still showed many spurts of blossom-fire. Dahlias and asters in big patches at the side kept this blaze alive, and the fire had apparently run underground to burst into flame in the file of maple trees that made a procession of torches across the back.

It was one of those days in middle autumn—Indian summer in quality—which, judging it on its merits, might belong to any one of three seasons. In the air, the freshness of spring, the softness of summer, the crispness of autumn, all touched with the odor of burning leaves, struggled for supremacy.

The six women sat on the glassed-in side piazza looking over the tennis courts towards the barn. A fire burnt in the outdoor fireplace, but the door to the piazza was open and one of the windows. They sat without wraps, all sewing or knitting—a haphazard, suburban group, ranging in type and age from Phoebe's lustrous, virile, deep-tinted youth, to Mrs. Martin's sparse, white-haired, finely characterized middle age including, like way-stations in the progress of womanhood, Sylvia's approaching-forty combination of a delicately faded blondness and a high-burning spirituality; Mrs. Meredith's dusky, dimpled, kittenish bridehood; Mrs. Fall's placid young motherhood, broad-browed and deep-eyed; and Mrs. Brodbeck's comfortable matronliness, grizzled but vivacious.

"We didn't get home until day before yesterday," Phoebe exclaimed thoughtfully, "and of course as it never entered Tug's head to tell me that the Murphy house was taken, it never occurred to me. I've been so busy that it wasn't until this morning that I noticed the curtains in the window. I think they must be away, because I haven't seen any lights at night. There! There's somebody driving up now—I guess they've come back."

Involuntarily the six women stopped their sewing to stare. One of the station carriages, proceeding briskly up the street, had stopped in front of the Day

house. Out of it came a single figure—that of an old man. He carried an enormous telescope suitcase in one hand and an enormous unfurled umbrella in the other. Both, obviously cheap, were obviously new. He plunged one hand in his pocket and withdrew it. He let the driver pick out his pay from a handful of change with a remark that sent him away smiling. Then the old man mounted the steps of the piazza and rang the doorbell.

"Unexpected company," commented Mrs. Meredith.

"It's the first time I've seen anybody go there," remarked Mrs. Brodbeck.

The old man waited, then rang the bell again. Nothing happened. After an interval he tried the doorknob. The door did not open. Depositing the suitcase and umbrella against the side of the house, he descended the steps; walked around to the back of the house.

"He's trying the back door," Mrs. Fall explained.
"Perhaps they've left it open for him."

"Nice-looking old man, isn't he?" Mrs. Brodbeck remarked.

"Very," Phoebe agreed. "It's queer about people, isn't it? Some of them you like right off. I know I like him just by the look of his back."

The old man reappeared, returning from the back of the house. He reascended the steps. He went

about from window to window, trying them all. Finally, he sat down in one of the big piazza chair, a monument to the quiet patience which only old age learns to exercise.

"He's evidently come to stay," concluded Mrs. Meredith.

"I wonder when the Days will get back," Mrs. Brodbeck meditated, a little uneasily.

Nobody answered. The six women went on with their sewing. Occasionally a head turned and a glance stole across the street to the quiet figure on the piazza.

"Do I look all right now, mother?" Edward's voice interrupted.

The women turned and surveyed the figure in the doorway.

Edward had done nobly. Stockings and waist were changed; trousers were tight. His cheeks and chin glowed with soap polish. A triangle of untouched smut in the middle of his forehead stood out more luridly, however, because of its contrast to contiguous cleanliness.

"Come here, Edward," Phoebe commanded in a tone noble with resignation. She took a little mirror from her sewing-basket. "Look!" She held it out to him.

Edward looked into the mirror. Phoebe looked at Edward. And in spite of herself, her pride in him

filled her eyes. Phoebe's children were all comely. Bertha-Elizabeth was spirit-faced and unusual; Toland junior, a giant, early-teens reproduction of his father's virility and vitality. The lost Phoebe-Girl had been a rose-and-snow wonder of velvet surfaces; dimpled contours. Micah had the taut, coppery picturesqueness of a baby Indian. Hope's chubby, pink-cheeked blonde infancy promised much. But Edward—

Edward was a young prince. Caste—race—breeding—all those qualities we obstinately insist on imputing to royalty lay in his graceful, supple lines. And as for his colors—secretly Phoebe yearned for the ministrations of a Reynolds or a Hoppner. A complexion of cream and amber; eyes of a vibrant gray that thrilled, under emotion, to gold; hair, tawny-brown, flashing gold too and breaking everywhere into heavy ripples.

"Gee, I didn't see that—honest, mother, I didn't. I just washed my cheeks and mouth. Generally, it *is* my cheeks and mouth that get dirty—you know that, mother. I scarcely ever bother about my forehead. Why, days and days when I get up in the morning, it's perfectly clean and I don't have to touch it."

Phoebe sighed—obviously after whirling in conflicting emotions. "Go up and try again, Edward," she ordered with a stony patience.

"But can I keep the puppy?"

"We'll see. Don't get the soap in his eyes when you wash him."

"Well," Phoebe went on at once. "I think he'll get it clean this time. Now, tell me all the rest of the gossip. What's happened during my absence?"

"Well, everything's happened," began Mrs. Meredith. "Or nothing's happened—just as you choose to look at it. Fred Towne broke his arm just the day before they were to start on their vacation. Lou Dodge's baby came three weeks ahead of time. The nurse wasn't there nor the doctor, and Lou said she never paid any bills so grudgingly as those two, seeing that she did all the work herself. Little Molly Mayo has acquired the running-away habit and the whole neighborhood has to watch her. Phil Murray was nearly drowned in swimming. The Doanes' house caught on fire in the middle of the night and would have burnt if the dog hadn't roused them by barking—oh yes, and Henry Abbott woke up one night and caught a burglar going through his trousers pockets. The Lund cat has had kittens. I think that's about all. Still, I could scare up some more items equally exciting if I only had time. Oh, my goodness, yes—Mary Fenton had her pocket picked and—"

"He's coming over here," interrupted Mrs. Brodbeck.

The old man had risen from his chair on the

piazza, had come hesitatingly down the piazza steps, and was coming hesitatingly across the street. He opened the Warburton gate and started hesitatingly up the path. Phoebe arose.

"I hope you'll excuse me for interrupting this little sewing-bee," the old man said. "My name is Davis."

He was little and slender, but very erect, white-haired, and white-bearded, the type which both graceless caricature and serious illustration have taught us to believe predominates in what is left of the Grand Army of the Republic. His broad-brimmed hat, his alert, erect carriage helped in this resemblance. His face was old and peaked, whitish and lined, but his smile brought a great deal of illumination to it. He smiled now. His eyes twinkled and little concentric colonies of wrinkles at their corners seemed to pass the twinkle on to other concentric colonies of wrinkles about his lips.

Mr. Davis looked about him with the air of one who has absolutely established his identity. His look met no response from the six faces. He added: "Elijah Davis—from Saugus, Vermont—Mrs. Day's father. You're Mrs. Warburton, aren't you?" he asked in sudden alarm. Then at Phoebe's bow of assent and "Won't you come up, Mr. Davis?" the alarm changed to serenity. He mounted the piazza steps, talking all the time.

" That's all right then. I've come down here to pay Dolly a little visit. This is the first time I've been to see her since she was married. I'm ashamed to tell you that; but it's the truth. Always been intendin' to do it, but never quite made it. And now I'm here, I tell you, ladies, I feel good and ashamed to think of the way I've neglected the best little daughter that a man ever had. But I guess I don't have to tell you what kind of a girl Dolly is, because I know just as well as you do how you appreciate her and how kind you are to her. Every letter she's written has been full of the things you've done for her. Oh, she takes it all in, every bit of it. Nothing's ever lost on *her*. Well, as I was saying, I planned to get here day after tomorrow. They're expecting me then. They don't know I'm here, but things broke so I could get away two days ahead of time. So I says to myself, ' What's the use of waiting? I might just as well be down there visiting with Dolly as cooling my heels up here in Saugus;' for I'm the kind, as soon as I get it into my head to do a thing, I want to do it. But apparently they've gone off somewhere—not expecting me, of course. I thought you ladies might know where she was."

" Take this chair, Mr. Davis," Phoebe said, pushing a big, cushioned wicker chair towards him. " I think you'll find it comfortable. I don't happen to know where Mrs. Day is, but she's likely to be back

any moment, and you must wait with us until she comes."

"This is a comfortable chair," Mr. Davis commented, as he sank into its capacious arms. "I'd know there was a man in this house. There's sure to be comfortable chairs where the menfolks are. I've allus noticed that." He smiled about the circle. "Now, ain't this a cozy little place for you ladies to sit and sew!" His eyes went from the pair of Gloucester hammocks, carefully upholstered in brilliant chintzes and piled with cushions in extravagant futuristic colors, to the little tables which bore sewing-bags, sewing-materials, sewing-tools, to the fire crackling and sparkling in the wide fireplace, to the big jars in a green Chinese glaze full of ardent autumn branches. "You're as snug as a bug in a rug out here, aren't you? You don't *any* of you know where Dolly is?"

Mrs. Brodbeck spoke first; her smile, extraordinarily youthful, making havoc of the middle-aged contours of her face. "I don't know, I'm sure. Mrs. Day didn't happen to mention to me where she was going."

"Nor to me, either," Sylvia added. She, too; smiled—the gentle, light-filled smile that flashed arrow-like across her face and then vanished in a settled seriousness. "She's probably gone only for the day."

"She'll feel very badly to know that you arrived during her absence," Mrs. Meredith took it up. She unloosed all her dimples on Mr. Davis, who met them with a gallant display of twinkles.

"However, you must stay with us until she gets home," declared Phoebe. "Oh, thank goodness, here comes something to eat. I hope you like tea, Mr. Davis. Over here, Annie."

"Well, if there's anything that will go to the right spot this moment," remarked Mr. Davis, "it's a cup of tea. It was an awful hot, dusty ride from Saugus, and I guess I'm just like an old woman—I do like tea. That's a smart little contraption." He referred to the green-tinted, wicker tea-wagon that Annie was wheeling across the broad piazza. She stopped in front of Phoebe, adjusted it to a convenient nearness, removed the tea-cozy of a brilliant Chinese embroidered silk from the teapot of Canton medallion. Mr. Davis leaned forward and surveyed the arrangement with a pleased and child-like interest. "Upper deck covered with cups and saucers and teapot and lower deck with sandwiches, cake and cheese. Now, ain't that handy?"

"Yes," Phoebe agreed. "It certainly is handy. We use this tea-wagon for everything. We've worn out two of them. The maids take dishes on it from dining-room to kitchen, the children take their toys in and out on it, I take things from the house to the

piazza and back on it. In fact, I think on a pinch we could move with it. Oh, Mr. Davis, I forgot that you don't know our names. Let me introduce you to these ladies: Mrs. Brodbeck, Mrs. Fall, Mrs. Meredith, my mother, Mrs. Martin, and my sister, Mrs. Ernest Martin."

"Oh, those names are all as familiar to me," Mr. Davis said, bowing to each, "as though you were my neighbors in Saugus. Every letter Dolly writes me is full of you and what you've been doing. She says she was never in such a kind neighborhood. Some folks aren't neighborly at all, you know. It isn't any fun to live in a place where people don't take you right in and treat you like themselves. And Dolly's the kind that's always had a lot of notice taken of her. Up in Saugus they think everything of her. She's smart as a trap, bright as a dollar, and quick as a cat. Neat as wax too! Does anything with a needle that any other woman can. And cook! Maybe I'd do better to let other folks say this, but then I've got a great comeback when anybody joshes me about praising Dolly. I always say, 'I don't know who's to know any better than I do what a smart girl she is.' "

There came an awkward pause. Phoebe busied herself with the tea-things, making no attempt to break it. Mrs. Fall cast down her eyes in a similar embarrassment. Mrs. Brodbeck wet her lips and

palpably made an effort to speak. As palpably she failed. Mrs. Meredith drew in her breath quickly and then let it out quickly, as though it would bear a rush of words, but she failed, too. Sylvia stared helplessly.

Mrs. Martin spoke. "Yes, we often say among ourselves," she remarked evenly, "what a remarkable housewife your daughter is."

The little stiff silence which followed Mrs. Martin's remark might have prolonged itself to embarrassment. But again interruption helped. Two girls, somewhere in their middle teens, came sauntering onto the piazza, arm-in-arm.

"Oh, mother!" said one of them. And then, "Good afternoon, everybody! Mother, could I show Cely your new pink evening gown and the evening coat and the slippers and everything?"

"Good afternoon, Cely!" Phoebe responded.
"Yes—"

"And could I show her what's in your jewelry box—?"

"The Warburton diamonds!" Phoebe said in amused explanation to the Sewing-Club. "Yes, Bertha-Elizabeth. Only promise—"

"I *promise* you, mother, that I'll put everything back where I find it."

Bertha-Elizabeth was slender, almost thin. But now, her big lucid eyes were not too big for the deli-

cate angularity of her face. And she showed a color that threatened to become brilliant. Cely Connors, round and strong-looking, with great Erin-colored eyes shining from under the smoky mass of her Erin-colored hair, seemed no longer essentially stronger.

Cely's eyes went with smiling composure from face to face as she bowed to the members of the Sewing-Club. But Bertha-Elizabeth's gaze, so direct and earnest that it was almost poignant, caught on Mr. Davis' look, stayed there. The old man and the young girl surveyed each other. In one of those sudden soul-comprehensions, common only to youth and age, they took each other's measure; smiled in immediate and radiant friendship.

"That's a sweet little girl of yours," Mr. Davis said, as Bertha-Elizabeth disappeared. "Something about her face—not jest pretty—but something better."

"I always say that Bertha-Elizabeth looks like an angel on a diet," Mrs. Brodbeck laughed.

Mr. Davis went back in the conversation to that point where the two girls had interrupted, as though with deliberate courtesy: "Thank you for giving me all those compliments about Dolly. Dolly says you're all as smart as a whip, too." Mr. Davis laughed his chuckling little laugh; and again the concentric wrinkles about his old eyes passed the kindly twinkle on to his old lips. "Many's the time I've

smacked my lips over her letters, telling me of the good things she's had to eat at your houses. Those little Sunday-night suppers and those picnics in the woods! Well, if you will believe it, sometimes after reading her letters I've had to go out into the pantry and get a piece of pie or a chunk of cheese, or something."

He interrupted himself here to take the cup of tea which Phoebe handed him. "Will you have sugar or cream, or both?" Phoebe asked.

"Both, thank you, ma'am," he said. He poured a supply, conscientiously meager, of cream into his cup. "That's good-looking cream!" he commented with an air of authority. He picked up the sugar tongs and made an ineffectual effort to capture a cube of sugar. He abandoned that after an instant and with a "Fingers were made before forks," conveyed two lumps with his fingers. But he took great pains not to touch adjacent lumps. He stirred the mixture vigorously; then tasted it. "Lord, that goes to the right spot!" he commented. "Nothing like a taste of tea to set you up."

For an instant in the flurry of tea-serving, and while sandwiches and cakes and cheese were making the rounds, general conversation died. Mr. Davis continued to drop his cheerful comments, however.

"This is a mighty pretty neighborhood," he said once between his long sips. "Lots of air and sky

and space. I'm glad Dolly moved where it isn't so crowded. She was used to plenty of space up in Saugus. That's a tidy little hill you've got back there," he added later. "Mt. Fairview you call it. Just a few feet more and it would have been a regular mountain. I'd like to go up to the top some day. I'll bet there's a pretty view there. And the marshes out yonder are handsome at this time of the year, now ain't they? I like the Fall. I didn't useter like it so much when I was young, but now when the leaves come flying down, it makes me feel good—I don't know why. I watched you ladies for quite some time before I made up my mind I'd come over here. You looked as though you were having such a good powwow, I hated to butt in. I says to myself, 'I know them ladies are talking over everybody and everything, as ladies always do when they're alone, and when a man interrupts, it ruins it all.' When my wife was alive, the Saugus Ladies' Aid used to meet at our house. Almost always I'd go away for the day, but sometimes I'd be home—I'm a dentist by profession and my office's in the house—and, my land, such a chatter! I couldn't hear myself think, let alone talk. Sometimes I useter suspect that they didn't hear each other speak—only themselves. Why, once I remember—— What is it, ma'am?"

He addressed himself to Mrs. Brodbeck. Over

that lady's broad, kindly maternal face had come a change of expression. Her color rose and her eyelashes fluttered.

"There's Mrs. Day now," she said. "Your daughter's come home, Mr. Davis."

Mr. Davis jerked his chair about with a sudden energy. He jumped to his feet. "Dolly! Dolly!" he called. "Look who's here!"

At the sound of his voice, the woman who had come slowly up the street and turned slowly into the yard of the house across the way, wheeled swiftly around. All that was flesh about her petrified. The small rectangular silver purse which she carried at the end of a chain, oscillated a moment, then it too came to heavy rest. She was a little blonde woman, not young, but youngish; not pretty, but prettyish; dressed in black and white, inconspicuously, but with a crisp daintiness. As she stared at the picture on the Warburton piazza, the little figure waving its broad-brimmed felt hat in the midst of the six women, the color gradually drifted out of her face. Her eyes lost light, lost expression, darkened; turned to mere rounds of jelly. Her mouth dropped open.

"Well, I guess I've surprised you, all right," her father called genially. "You'll have to come over here and get me, Dolly. I'm having such a good time that maybe I'll make my visit with Mrs. Warburton."

"Do, Mrs. Day," Phoebe urged civilly, "come and have a cup of tea with us."

Mrs. Day came back to animation, but only to fall into a very panic of irresolution. She shrank back. She started forward. She stood still, clasping and unclasping her hands. But all the time, her big eyes stayed glazed dull spots in her white face, and all the time her mouth kept its stricken look of terror. Apparently, some power within—apart from her will—set her going; finally drove her onward. She crossed the street at a pace that grew from a paralyzed slowness to panic-stricken hurry.

Her father ran to meet her. His arms went about her waist. Her arms went about his neck. They kissed, not once, but many times. Mrs. Day's head dropped for an instant to his shoulder. Her eyes closed. He patted her gently. But now her fear and weakness were evaporating rapidly. "Come right home, father," she ordered in a faint voice. "This instant! I'm sorry I was away. You must be tired to death—and hungry—and dusty—and—and—and hungry—and tired to death—and dusty—" She kept repeating herself, as one who is thinking of things other than those she is saying.

"You must drink this cup of tea first, Mrs. Day," Phoebe interposed decisively. "It will make you feel better."

As in a daze, Mrs. Day took the cup that Phoebe extended to her. She drank, but it was only with a determined effort. At the first taste, however, as though at the demand of some fierce physical need, she swallowed it in a single draught. She handed the empty cup back to Phoebe. "Thank you, Mrs. Warburton."

"I've been telling these ladies," her father said jovially, "that I knew all about them before ever I met them. Just think of it!" He turned to the sextette of silent listeners. "Five years this little girl's been living down here, and never once has she missed writing her Daddy a long letter Sunday night." He turned back to his daughter, threw his arms about her. "And I've told them how you've written all about them and their kindness to you and I've told them how grateful I am to them for it and I've told them that's how I know what good wives and mothers—and cooks too—they all are."

His daughter did not speak, but her little hand clutched his arm and her eyes, mutely imploring, went from one face to the other until they had made the round of the six women. There was an interval of dead silence through which a passing motorcycle dragged a jarring chain of sound.

Phoebe spoke first. She addressed herself to Mr. Davis. "It's very nice of you to say all those pleasant things and we're all so glad you're here. You

said you'd like to see the view from Mt. Fairview. My husband and my two oldest sons are going for a tramp up the mountain Sunday. Wouldn't you like to go with them, Mr. Davis?" She turned to Mrs. Day. "That is if your daughter hasn't any other plans for you."

"No—I haven't—I haven't thought—if father would care—why—what would you like to do, father?" Mrs. Day faltered.

"I would like to go first-rate," Mr. Davis declared.

"All right." Phoebe's manner was now quite offhand. "They'll start somewhere in the middle of the morning, and stay all day. I'll put up a lunch for you all. Mr. Warburton wants to show Edward—that's our second boy—where he used to play when he was a child. I think you'll enjoy it, Mr. Davis. The view is really very pretty from the top. You can see Boston in the distance if it's a clear day; and sometimes the sunlight flashes on the golden dome of the State House. I hate to take your father away from you, Mrs. Day, but Mr. Warburton will enjoy him."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Warburton," Mrs. Day breathed. "Now, father, we *must* go home."

She turned swiftly, her little white hand still clutching convulsively her father's bigger, browner one. Half-way down the length of the piazza, she turned.

"Thank you—thank you all—very much—for taking care of father like this." Her voice died in a husky murmur.

The six women sat stock-still and watched them cross the road.

After dinner that night, Phoebe was called to the telephone. It was Mrs. Meredith. "Goodness, Phoebe!" she plunged without preliminary into an excited harangue, "you have no idea how that scene this afternoon has haunted me. Wasn't it *terrible*? That Mr. Davis was such an old darling! Don't you just *love* him?"

"I thought he was a perfect *duck!*" Phoebe answered.

"When I think," Mrs. Meredith poured on, "that he might have gathered from the way we acted—or we might have said something that would accidentally have given the whole thing away, I could cry my eyes out. And I really felt for Mrs. Day. Did you ever see a woman with such a case of the rattles?"

"I never saw anybody turn such a color," declared Phoebe. "I thought she was going to faint."

"Of course, Elliott is away," continued Mrs. Meredith, "but my brother Henry is here while Jane is at the hospital, and I told him he simply *had* to do something for Mr. Davis. At first he was

bored and said he wouldn't, but when I explained the situation to him in detail, he said 'All right.' Henry's just called Mr. Davis up and asked him if he would go to Keith's with him some night next week. When Henry told him that there were some trained elephants on the bill, you would have thought it was a child going to his first circus. He said, 'I've always heard that city folks were so cold, but now I know better.' "

"Oh, I'm so glad you've done that," said Phoebe.

"Henry said," Mrs. Meredith went on, and now there was a pause in the flood of words; she spoke slowly, "he didn't see why we don't let bygones be bygones and invite Mr. and Mrs. Day and her father to the house. But I told him we simply *couldn't* do that. And we *can't*. Can we, Phoebe?"

"Of course we can't," Phoebe declared indignantly.

Later that evening, Mrs. Fall called Phoebe up. "Oh, Phoebe dear," she began, "I've been in the dumps ever since this afternoon, thinking of Mrs. Day and her father. I want to do something—I don't know what. Of course I can't do anything about *her*—I mean like having her come to the house or that sort of thing. I've got three little girls, and somehow—well, it may sound bromidic, but it

certainly is up to us women to maintain the *sanctity* of the home. But I can't get her out of my mind. How frightened she was this afternoon! Of course, she jumped to the conclusion that either we had given the whole thing away to her father or would do it before she got him off the piazza—just as though we were cats. Well, I've been telling Billy all about it—really, he felt just as cut up as I do. You'd be surprised how much of that kind of feeling there is in Billy. He immediately tried to think of something we could do for Mr. Davis. He's taking a long automobile trip Monday. There's some rich people he thinks may buy the Duncan place, but they want to see the whole neighborhood first, so he called up Mr. Davis and asked him if he wanted to go with him. My dear, he was tickled to death—just like a child. I was awfully glad Billy did that. I've been trying to think how we could get around the situation. Of course, I can't do anything for Mrs. Day, for if there's anything we women *must* do, it's keep up the moral tone of a community. Don't you think so, Phoebe?" Mrs. Fall's voice had a beseeching note.

"Oh, yes," Phoebe answered decidedly. "I do. Yes, we certainly must do that. Yes, by all means *yes.*" Phoebe put a growing emphasis on each "*yes.*" It was apparent that she had gone over this question many times in her own mind.

The next morning Mrs. Brodbeck called Phoebe up. "Oh, my dear," she began, "I hardly slept all night from thinking of Mrs. Day and her father. Before I fell asleep, I said to myself that I ought to do something for *her*, and then I wondered if after all—you know, Phoebe, I've got two grown-up sons and I've never introduced any element into my home that wasn't beautiful and ennobling. But I kept waking up in the night thinking of those two—how white she got and how she clung to him and his pride in her and his perfect faith that we were all crazy about her. Tom didn't get home until nearly three—a directors' meeting—of course I didn't trouble him then, but I told him this morning that I wanted him to do something that would show Mr. Davis that we really were neighborly and yet would not involve me with Mrs. Day in any way. Well, you know what Tom is like. First he said he was too busy and wasn't interested and couldn't be bothered to do anything. That's the way he always acts when I put anything unexpectedly to him. But he's just called me up from the office to say that he telephoned Mr. Davis at Mrs. Day's and asked him to go to one of the World's Series games with him Saturday afternoon."

"That's so like Tom," Phoebe commented.

"Isn't it?" his wife agreed. "I know just exactly how it affected him. It got on his conscience

and bothered him until he had to do something about it. Tom said Mr. Davis went perfectly crazy over the idea of going to a big game—says he's always been wild to see Ty Cobb. Says he won't sleep or eat until Saturday comes. Tom says he likes him just from his voice over the telephone."

"Well, he certainly is a darling," agreed Phoebe.

"As for Mrs. Day—why do women do such things, Phoebe?" Mrs. Brodbeck asked earnestly.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Phoebe. "I don't *know*." The stress she put on the word "*know*" held a note of irritability.

"I do wish that we could——" Mrs. Brodbeck broke off wistfully. "But we can't, can we, Phoebe?"

"No," Phoebe said stormily. "We can't."

"Tug," Phoebe said to her husband that night at dinner, "every one of the women who was here yesterday has called me up to tell me that she's going to do something for Mr. Davis—I mean every one except mother. Nothing has ever illustrated more perfectly to me the difference between her generation and ours. Mother wouldn't ever think of doing such a thing. Women are certainly growing more fine in their attitude towards each other every day. Of course, we can't do anything for Mrs. Day——"

'Across the table Phoebe's eyes raked her husband's face pleadingly.

"I don't see why not," Tug declared.

"We can't, Tug, that's all there is to it," Phoebe insisted. "We just *can't*. Still it's encouraging that there's an impulse——"

"Well, I don't see why not," Tug repeated in a tone of sheer bafflement. "And I must say, I see nothing encouraging—— It's absolutely immoral in my opinion to take out a fine impulse in talk. But then I won't butt in. It's a woman's question. You've got to settle it yourselves."

"Mr. Davis went back to Saugus last night," Mrs. Meredith remarked at the next meeting of the Sewing-Club after the laughter of greetings had died down. "He stayed three days over his week. Elliott teased him to go fishing with him Tuesday, and he finally consented. I called him up yesterday afternoon to say good-by. I'm glad for his sake that this good weather kept up."

"Yes," Mrs. Fall took it up, "I think it's warmer than it was two weeks ago when we were here. Really, Phoebe, we hardly need a fire today. Fred said that Mr. Davis had the most interesting line of talk that he ever listened to from a hayseed. Mr. Davis has planned it all out for Fred to come

up there for a week next summer, and Fred says he's going."

"Tom says it was the greatest fun taking him to the ball game," Mrs. Brodbeck added. "He said Mr. Davis was the most amusing fan he ever saw. Enjoyed it just like a child, and when Ty Cobb made that phenomenal run in the last inning, well, Tom said he had to hold him in his seat."

The talk drifted to other subjects.

"I would like to know how Mrs. Day feels about all this?" Phoebe suddenly turned it back again, without reference to the rest of the conversation.

"I would, too," agreed Mrs. Fall.

"She probably doesn't know what to think," Mrs. Meredith suggested.

"I passed her on the street the other day," said Mrs. Brodbeck. "She looked away the instant she saw me, so as not to give me the chance to cut her, but I called out 'Good morning, Mrs. Day. Isn't it wonderful weather?'"

"What did she say?" Mrs. Meredith demanded breathlessly.

"Oh, nothing epoch-making," Mrs. Brodbeck laughed. "Just something civil."

"I bet she's a very grateful woman," Phoebe suggested. "Don't you, mother?"

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Martin slowly. "I don't know what she's to be *grateful* about—un-

less you expect her to be grateful to a crowd of women just for not acting like a pack of wolves."

A moment of dead silence fell. "Well, mother, if you think——" Phoebe was beginning.

"There's Mrs. Day now," Mrs. Fall murmured under her breath. "She's just come out of her house—she's crossing the street—I think she's coming here, Phoebe."

Mrs. Day *was* coming to the Warburton house. She turned in at the gate and moved quietly up the path towards the piazza. She bore—it engaged both her small hands—a big, blue platter, on which, covering something mound-like in shape, glistened a square of damask. Phoebe arose with a "How do you do, Mrs. Day?"

"Mrs. Warburton," Mrs. Day answered without formal greeting, "this was baking day with me and—I—thought you might like some of my angel-cake—with—your tea. I—don't always have good luck with it—but—this has turned out very well." Her flustered speech came to an end.

"Oh, thank you very much," Phoebe said. She took the platter from Mrs. Day and placed it on the tea-table; removed the napkin. "Oh, that looks perfectly delicious—light as a feather. Did you ever see such cake, girls?"

The sewing-circle ejaculated admiring superlatives.

Mrs. Day stood still, her eyes down. The pause lengthened. When the murmurs died, she tried to speak, but at first words would not come. "And I would like to say," she began finally, "that I appreciate all that you did for my father while he was here—every bit of it. My husband does, too, and if there is anything I can ever do—" Her voice, which had started thin and faltering, deepened suddenly on the word "do" and seemed to gain body and volume; her eyelids came up and her glance went, earnest and unembarrassed, from face to face.—"to repay you, I hope you will let me. I can't think of anything now—except that I'm a good nurse and sometime in case of sickness, especially in an emergency, you might like to know of somebody upon whom you could depend. I'll give up anything I'm doing or any engagement I have to help any one of you. I was dreading my father's visit—awfully—you don't know how much. I put it off as long as I could. I had a whole lot of lies made up to explain why nobody came to see us, but I didn't have to tell them. He never guessed. He never had such a good time in all his life. But he would have thought it very strange, if it hadn't been for you. Oh, you don't know how grateful I am."

"I'm so glad your father enjoyed his visit, Mrs. Day," Phoebe said. "We all thought him a perfect darling, and now," she added, "won't you and

Mr. Day come to dinner with Mr. Warburton and me tomorrow night—that is if you haven't any other engagement?"

"No, I have no other engagement." Mrs. Day said this in a dazed way after a little interval in which dumbly she searched Phoebe's face. "We shall be very glad to come," she added after another dumb interval in which obviously she sought for words. She started to leave.

"You mustn't go now, Mrs. Day," Mrs. Meredith stayed her. "Not at least before you've had some tea. It's one rule of the club that anybody who comes in on a meeting must eat with us." She handed Mrs. Day the cup of tea which she had hastily poured. "Do sit down."

Still obviously dazed, Mrs. Day mechanically obeyed her. Phoebe began to cut the angel-cake.

"The next meeting of this Sewing-Club," Mrs. Brodbeck went on, "takes place at my house, a week from today, Mrs. Day. We've been meeting with Mrs. Warburton all this month because she has the outdoor fireplace, but next week it will be too cold for that. I want you to come, Mrs. Day—if you haven't any other engagement."

"I shall be delighted," said Mrs. Day. Her daze had departed, and she looked steadily at Mrs. Brodbeck. But her eyes deepened in color, as the tears filled them.

"Mrs. Day, would you go in town with me tomorrow to the matinée to see 'The Tipperary Lad'?" Mrs. Fall asked. "They say it's a scream from start to finish. I should love to have you—that's if you haven't any other engagement."

"I'd just love it," Mrs. Day admitted. "I don't know when I've been to the theater." She turned her look directly on Mrs. Fall. Her lips did not quiver, but the tears still hung thick on her eyelashes.

"I won't invite Mrs. Day just yet a while," said Mrs. Martin, creating a diversion. "I guess she's had enough of us for one spell. She and Mr. Day and Mr. Davis came to dinner the night before Mr. Davis left, and I don't know how many times Edward and I have dropped in on them when they didn't expect us."

"Oh, Mother Martin!" Phoebe exclaimed, glaring at her mother with an expression that was not all mock exasperation. "Think of your entertaining Mrs. Day first! You're always stealing a march on me, but some day I'll get you. You watch me."

"You'll have to start early to get ahead of your mother, Phoebe," Mrs. Brodbeck prophesied. "By the way, Mrs. Day, I want to ask you, before inviting you to join our sewing-club permanently, if you like to sew."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Brodbeck, I do," Mrs. Day an-

swered. Her tears seemed to be flowing backwards now; her cleared eyes met Mrs. Brodbeck's with a long look of understanding. "I like to sew, and in the next few months I shall have quite a lot of sewing to do—baby clothes," she explained simply.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VAMP

"ISN'T Molly coming today?" Phoebe Warburton asked Sylvia.

"She said she was," Sylvia answered. "I can't understand what's keeping her. It's her boast that she's never late to the Sewing-Club."

"Yes, she does enjoy it," Mrs. Fall remarked. "It means a lot to her."

"It means a lot to all of us," Mrs. Day said gently. "I'm sure I don't know what I would do without it. It has grown into my life so."

"It gives you something to look forward to. I find myself thinking of it all the week." Sylvia spoke a little absently. She had an occasional eye for the lawn and a constant ear for the kitchen. On the lawn, her two little daughters, Elizabeth-Marian, a delicate, laughing pale-blonde child; and Sylvia, brown, very deep-eyed and serious, were playing dolls. From the direction of the kitchen, a door opening frequently, let out the sound of cream being whipped.

"I've been thinking of it a lot lately—analyzing it," Phoebe went on. "I think that one reason that

we enjoy it so much is that it's a comfortable way of growing middle-aged together."

"Middle-aged! Phoebe, you monster!" Mrs. Brodbeck charged.

"Yes, middle-aged!" Phoebe stood stanchly by her guns. "We've reached the age, every one of us, when we're letting down, all along the line. We do over our last winter's evening clothes and our last summer's hats. We don't get massaged or marcelled or manicured. Oh, I suppose it's bound to be—"

"Yes," Mrs. Fall decided, "it can't be helped with children growing up! There's so much to buy for them—"

"Here's Molly now!" Sylvia exclaimed. "Oh!" This "oh" was merely recognition of Maggie, who came in wheeling the tea-wagon. Sylvia busied herself with the cups.

"You're fired!" "You're expelled!" "Charges will be preferred!" came in chorus as Mrs. Meredith entered the room.

Mrs. Meredith did not smile. She slowly drew the worn fur piece from about her neck; slowly took off her hat and coat. "I've been long-distancing."

"Nothing serious, I hope?" Mrs. Brodbeck queried.

"Of course it's serious," Phoebe declared. "Not one of her dimples is on the job."

"I don't know whether it's serious or not," Mrs. Meredith said without greeting and still without smiling. "I don't know whether I'm in the worst pickle I ever was in or not. I don't know whether I'm a malefactor or not. I feel as though I was going to start a terrible epidemic in this town. I feel as though I was one of those human disease-carriers that you read about in the magazines."

"My goodness, Molly!" Phoebe broke in.
"What *are* you talking about?"

"Listen!" Molly answered. And even now, not one of the dimples, which Phoebe had predicated, appeared in the dusky round of her cheek. "You remember that I got a note from an unknown female about ten days ago, enclosing a letter of introduction from an old friend of mine, Alice Robinson? And perhaps you remember that the unknown female said she was coming to Boston and that I invited her to spend a week with me." Her eyes, traveling about the circle of faces, apparently culled enough of recollection, for she went on, "Well, this morning I got a letter from Alice. I'll read it. It shouts for itself in large, round, emphatic letters:

'DEAR MOLLY:

In a few days, a girl from this town, Sibyl Storrow, will present to you a letter of introduction, which I have just written for her. She's going to Boston for a visit and knowing that I had friends there, she asked me for letters.

I was very glad to give them to her because Sibyl is a perfectly dandy girl. And yet, I thought I would like to write an extra word of explanation—something, as you will readily see, that would scarcely go into a letter of introduction. Somehow, it seems only fair to you to do this. I'm not quite sure that it's fair to her; but in thinking it over, I have concluded that I've no choice in the matter. Anyway, I'm taking the chance. So here goes!

As one woman to another, Sibyl Storrow is absolutely all right in every respect but one. She's perfectly honest in money matters; keeps her engagement; is straight, in short, in all the ways in which we like a woman to be straight. But nevertheless, there's one out about her. She's a flirt. She's an awful flirt. She's the worst flirt I've ever known in all my life. I don't think she means any real harm. Sometimes I think she doesn't realize what she's doing. She can't help it. She was born that way. But she's rather exasperating to other women. Everything in trousers is fish to her net—babies in the cradle, boys in prep-school, college men, middle-aged business men, doddering senile wrecks—from nine to ninety she goes out after them all. And gets them. That's the worst of it—she always gets them. There's something about her—What it is, search me. She makes me think of a song I've heard somewhere:

*"What it was that Mary did, Mary didn't know: —
But everywhere that Mary went, the men were sure to
go."*

She isn't very pretty, although she does know how to dress. But she's got something on her that most women don't have. She can't help what she does. She attracts men, that's all there is to it. And so, my warning is, look out for sons, brothers, fathers, husbands, sweethearts. She's perfectly

impartial. As I said before, I think she's harmless; but fascinate men she must and does.

Now, if it proves that I've unloosed a human scourge on your neighborhood, please forgive me. What else could I do when she asked me for letters?

Yours with love but in great perplexity,

ALICE.'

Now what do you think of that?" Mrs. Meredith demanded.

All her dimples were playing now. She was a pretty woman; rounded in contour; velvet in surface; duskily dark. She paused an instant to look into the glass; to pull down a rather tumbled waist; and to adjust the mussed lace at her neck. There was a stir in the room, as much psychological as physical.

Mrs. Fall and Mrs. Brodbeck made an effort to blank their expressions. Mrs. Day's face took on an unmitigated seriousness. Sylvia alone showed no change. She went on serenely pouring tea. But Phoebe frankly laughed. "It sounds to me as though there was going to be some doings in this town," she said.

"When is she coming?" Mrs. Brodbeck asked.

"Tonight," Mrs. Meredith answered.

"I wonder what she looks like." Mrs. Fall dropped into a little flat interval of silence.

"I haven't the remotest idea," Mrs. Meredith answered.

"Sibyl," Mrs. Day said musingly. "It's a pretty name." Her china-blue eyes met the china-blue eyes reflected in one of Sylvia's long, old-fashioned mirrors. They seemed to take reassuring cognizance of the white-and-gold prettiness they met there.

Phoebe sighed ostentatiously. "Well, girls, I expect we'll have to get out our old duds and do our best to compete with this whirlwind among men. Not that I personally think I have any chance. But if a vicious vamp is determined to tear my husband from me, I suppose I won't give him up without a struggle."

"Oh, she'll have an easy enough time with Tug," Mrs. Fall remarked. "Everybody knows how hard Tug is straining at the matrimonial leash."

"Please come to a party at my house tomorrow evening," Mrs. Meredith begged. "Bring your husbands and all adjacent males, encumbered or unencumbered. And let the slaughter begin as soon as possible. Of course I'll sacrifice Elliott on the altar of hospitality immediately. By the time you arrive, she'll probably have swallowed him whole. But unless she falls in a state of torpor in order to masticate and digest him, I shall expect you to hand over your loved ones to her, one at a time."

"Tug," Phoebe commanded, "this is the night you are to put on your glad rags. This is the night

we are to meet the Circe from the Middle West. Of course, she will have snatched you from me forever, before we get home this evening; so I will now take this opportunity to bid you a long and lingering farewell. You've been a good husband to me, Tug, and I wish I could have kept you. But with a younger and more beautiful woman in the game, the mere mother of your children must expect to go into the discard."

"Well, of course," Tug remarked, "the easiest thing I do is to fall for this vampire stuff. All my life I have hoped that some enchantress like this Helen from Troy would decide to enslave me, no matter what the cost to herself or me. In farewell, I will say, Phoebe, that you have been a good wife and a very satisfactory mother to my children. I hope that your life isn't ruined and that some day you may meet another man who will make you really happy."

"That's nice, Tug," Phoebe responded with the dancing eyes which always accompanied the long nonsensical dialogues that were her delight and Tug's. "Nobody could ever fill your place. I will say that if you had only taken my advice, you would have a much slimmer figure to present to this charmer."

"It doesn't make any difference about my figure, woman," Tug remarked with much heat. "One

look at this face, featured like a Greek god, and it's all off. They know when they have met their Waterloo. No vamp has ever yet survived the experience."

After which, whistling cheerfully, Tug went upstairs to his room. At the sight of the evening clothes lying on the bed, his whistling changed to groans. But without further ado, he slapped some lather onto his round ruddy face, irregular-featured; bristling as to mustache; and then dutifully climbed into the shining raiment. "It seems to me that you are looking pretty brisk this evening yourself, Mrs. Warburton," he said to his wife on his return to the living-room.

"Well, of course, I am doing my feeble best to retain the father of my children," Phoebe explained meekly. And she gave a sideways glance at the shining lengths of tulle-hung blue. "I haven't been able to make up my mind for a long time whether I could afford a new evening gown or not."

"I'm glad you decided you could," Tug said heartily. "That gown is a bird. You look great. I like you in evening gowns. I wish you'd buy a dozen."

When they entered Mrs. Meredith's charming big living-room, every chair seemed to hold a coruscating specimen of womanhood. The couch, however, a big, high-backed affair, was surrounded by black-

and-white masculine units. It was not until Mrs. Meredith said, "Miss Storrow, I want you to meet—" that its contents were revealed.

Then there disengaged itself from the black velvet background, a slight figure in white. That white was lustrous-surfaced. It dropped from slim shoulder to slimmer ankle, long lines that seemed a piquant combination of the mode of Greece with Paris. At the neck, a square of flesh showed a slight olive contrast with this ivory glimmer. Miss Storrow was a brunette, although she was pale; and her eyes were a little indeterminate in color and character. Her hair, however, was far from indeterminate either in color or character. It was jet-black; it clung so close to her head that it might have been glued down; it invaded her forehead, her ears, her very cheeks in long shining loops, equally flat.

She acknowledged the introductions with a little jerked nod; and turning immediately to a nearby mirror, proceeded so vigorously to apply a lip stick that her mouth seemed to turn to an opening poppy. It echoed—that opening poppy—the scarlet of long coral earrings; the scarlet of tiny, very pointed, velvet slippers; the scarlet of a narrow tasseled bag—the only bits of color in her costume.

The victrola started the instant Miss Storrow had performed this delicate operation. "I've not danced with Mr. Warburton yet," she said. She glided in

Tug's direction and that frankly-astonished gentleman suddenly found himself whirling her about the room.

Phoebe, with much-amused gray eyes, watched their progress. "I take off my hat to her," she remarked under her breath, seating herself beside Mrs. Day. "I never saw anything so quick or so complete as that. Perhaps you can beat it. I can't."

"Oh, you've lost most of it!" Mrs. Day said regretfully. "It's been wonderful. Well, will you look at that?"

Passing Mr. Day, though still dancing with Tug, Miss Storrow had reached out a slim hand; had drawn him to them. They danced a trio, for a while.

"She's a wonder!" Phoebe commented. "Do you know I envy her! I don't think that I've ever flirted in my life. I'm just beginning to realize what I've missed."

"Well, she isn't missing much," Mrs. Day declared grimly.

"Doesn't Molly look sweet tonight?" Phoebe went on. "Look at her gold slippers!"

"She told me," Mrs. Day said, "that Elliott admired Miss Storrow's slippers so much that she went in to Boston yesterday and bought three pairs, gold and silver and bronze. Hasn't she *darling* feet?"

"Oh, they're not *human!*" Phoebe affirmed.

"Will you look at that Storrow woman now?" Mrs. Day demanded, in a tone in which indignation wrestled with amusement.

Somebody had kept on cranking the victrola, so that the dance had been unduly prolonged. Miss Storrow had kept on accumulating partners, until now she moved in the midst of a group of six; a laughing white-and-scarlet accent to the black mass of men.

At the close of the dance, Phoebe seated herself beside Miss Storrow. But the conversation on which she embarked was so broken by masculine interruption, and by Miss Storrow's own interruptions, that she soon abandoned it. In fact, the evening turned into one prolonged ovation to Miss Storrow. She danced without cessation until the modest hour, shortly after midnight, when the affair broke up. She divided, re-divided, and sub-divided her dances. This was really unnecessary, as she continued her system of accumulating partners. She introduced new solo steps; even group improvements of various terpsichorean kinds. Sometimes came pauses in the music—notably, a long one in which supper was served. But when Miss Storrow was not dancing, she was tête-à-tête-ing with one victim, or coquetting with three or four. She was sweetly courteous to the women; but it was apparent that she did not see them when she looked at them; did not think of them

when she spoke to them; only half heard them when they replied to her.

This had a curious but inevitable effect on the party. Gradually it divided into sections; one, consisting of Miss Storrow, the men who crowded about her, the younger girls who subsisted on her rejections: the other, made up of the married women who covertly eyed these proceedings.

"Molly, isn't this a scream?" Phoebe said once to her hostess. "My sense of humor hasn't entirely deserted me; but I'm afraid it's wearing a little thin."

"I've concluded that I never had one!" Mrs. Meredith admitted.

"I said a long farewell to Tug this evening," Phoebe went on. "He's been very fair. He says no matter what happens, he's going to support me and the children the rest of our lives. What is she like to live with?"

"My dear!" Mrs. Meredith poured out a torrent. "You ought to have been here. I've never been so ignored in my own house in all my life. The moment Elliott comes home she monopolizes him as though they had just become engaged. When I do venture to speak—which is very rarely, I assure you—she listens to me with such a ceremonious look of interest that I wonder why I started to say anything."

"I don't know what her plans are," Phoebe commented. "The only place that I've heard of where

they permit polyandry is in Afghanistan. When I hear of Tug buying a ticket for the Orient, I'll consult a lawyer at once. Your slippers are lovely, Molly."

"The vamp has flashed a different pair every night. And Elliott just made me go in town and buy some. He said he *knew* my feet were smaller than hers. They are, too!" Mrs. Meredith's eyes danced with triumph.

But that evening at the Merediths' was only a delicate foreshadowing of what was to happen. Phoebe's house, which, consciously or unconsciously, everybody admitted to be the social center of the neighborhood, became a sort of telephone exchange on what was going on.

"What do you think that Storrow female has just done?" Mrs. Brodbeck demanded vehemently over the wire a day or two later. "Tom has just called me up from the office for no other reason apparently but to tell me she has just telephoned him from somewhere in Boston, where she is lost. She was so frightened—poor, helpless, shrinking little thing!—that there was nothing for him to do but go for her in a taxi. Why didn't she call up Elliott Meredith? He's her host. Oh yes, I remember, she did tell him that she looked up all their addresses and found Tom's was the nearest. Of course Tom had to invite her to luncheon. Did you ever hear of such a proceeding?"

"No, I never did!" Phoebe answered with conviction. "However, Nina, you looked lovely last evening! You were ungallant enough to be the belle of your own party. That blue chiffon over the green made an exquisite effect! Did Tom like it?"

"Oh yes. He liked it so much that he bought tickets for the opera tonight; and insisted on my wearing it! I just happened to see it, passing through Shale's, and bought it on the impulse. Wasn't that dress of hers marvelous—that dull gray with the Chinese embroidery and those Chinese earrings! How does Tug like Miss Storrow?"

"Well, he's still going through the motions of devotion to his family. But I expect to lose him forever at Mrs. Fall's whist tomorrow night."

"Well, Phoebe," Mrs. Fall broke out when the two women met marketing a few days later. "I must say that Storrow creature is the coolest proposition that I ever saw in my life. She goes in to Boston on the train with Fred every single morning and comes out with him every single night. Of course at first, she pretended it was an accident. An accident your grandmother! Nobody takes that nine-twenty-five but Fred—or the four-fifty for that matter. She sits with him all the time, of course. Fred told me that he wanted to do something for her; so he bought matinée tickets and sent them to her. I almost told

him that he could depend on me to do the family entertaining of strange women. But, of course, I didn't!"

"Well, Miriam, you never looked so well in your *life* as you did last night. Your hair was really wonderful. Who did it?"

"Madame Lili. Yes, I thought it looked well myself. And Fred told me that I'd simply got to have her do it twice a week after this."

"And didn't Dolly Day look lovely?" Phoebe went on.

"Yes. She made every bit of the lace in that dress herself. She said that she's been working on it on and off for years, but had sort of lost interest in it. But she got a spurt on last week and finished it."

"She certainly was a fairy vision!" Phoebe said enthusiastically. "She's so little and blonde and delicate. She seemed to float in a mist."

"And wasn't Carl proud of her!" Mrs. Fall laughed a little. "He simply couldn't take his eyes off her all the evening."

"Wasn't the Vamp marvelous last night?" Phoebe went on.

"I should say—she looked like a nasturtium—in all that yellow and orange. And weren't those earrings just the right touch? They were like little golden lamps! That dress gave Molly an idea. She's had tucked away for years some beautiful

brown and green gauze stuff that she got at Liberty's in London. She's going to have it made up right away—along the lines of Miss Storrow's dress."

"Oh, Phoebe, does the sewing-circle meet at your house as usual?" Mrs. Day inquired a day or two later.

"Yes," Phoebe answered.

"Did you ask the Vamp?"

"Of course! I don't suppose she'll want to waste so much time on a parcel of women. She may come, though."

"I don't think likely," Mrs. Day said, a slight acid note in her treble accents. "Where do you suppose she is this afternoon? Taking a walk with Carl. He told her about that great big rock on Mt. Fairview that he used to play on when he was a child, and she sort of roped him into showing it to her—she really did, I heard her. Of course she spoke of my going too, and Carl was crazy to have me; but naturally I wouldn't butt-in. It's too long a walk for me. She came to lunch with us. I wish you could have seen her when they started out. She was the smartest thing you ever laid your eyes on; a brown walking suit, very short in the skirt; tight-fitting brown gaiters; and oh, such a picturesque brown tam! Everything—suit, gaiters, shoes,

gloves—all the same brown. And tiny amber earrings! I never in my life saw such a disagreeable girl, did you, Phoebe?"

"The queer thing about it is," Phoebe answered analytically, "that though I'm trying as hard as I can to despise her, I can't quite pull it off. I've a sort of sneaking liking for her."

"I should like to know why," Mrs. Day asked in a scathing tone. Then she laughed. "Cat stuff, Phoebe! Is it because she has left off trying to fascinate Tug?"

"No, ever since she went into the office to read the evidence in that Runyon case, she's called him up every day about it. She even telephoned him at the house this morning while he was at breakfast. Oh, no, she hasn't soft-pedaled one atom as far as Tug is concerned. And yet—well, I'm telling you the exact truth when I say that I find something likable about her."

Mrs. Day groaned in an ostentation of agony. "All right, I'll be there tomorrow."

"Well, girls," Phoebe greeted her guests the next afternoon, "after all, for five wrecks of matrimony, you are looking pretty well. Everybody's got new clothes."

Her visitors laughed; but there was an element of exasperation in their mirth.

"Where is she this afternoon?" Mrs. Day asked.
"I don't think she's with *my* husband."

"Probably with mine," Mrs. Meredith answered,
"if not with Tug or Tom or Fred. Perhaps she's
corralled all five."

"What sort of a guest is she, now that you've had
her for a week?" Phoebe asked curiously.

"Oh, nice enough—if she'd ever let me speak to
my own husband. I had to signal to him this morning
to go out into the hall—to ask him for some money.
Curiously enough, the servants all like her and Belle's
children are wild about her. They come every morn-
ing to see her. I must say she has put herself out
for them—tells them stories and plays games with
them——"

"Well, I certainly think she's a strange critter."
Mrs. Day's tones seemed to dismiss the problem as
a hopeless one.

"For goodness' sake!" Phoebe emitted sibilantly,
"here she is now, coming up the walk. What
brought her here?" she added in a low tone. "Our
husbands must have all thrown her down!"

Her guests fell into a constrained silence; listened
avidly to the footsteps of the maid crossing the hall;
to the opening of the door; to Miss Storrow's fresh,
clear tones. And then, as with one accord, they
plunged into ejaculatory conversation.

"Oh, how do you do, Miss Storrow?" came out

of the chattering in Phoebe's most composed accents, as she rose to greet her guest. "This is a pleasant surprise. I'm delighted to see you."

"You would probably like to add—'and to what do I owe the pleasure?'" Miss Storror said.

She took off her long slim squirrel coat, revealing a close-fitting gown of blue serge, almost covered with broad black silk braid. The inevitable earrings, this time of jade and gold and—as usual—long, emerged from under the deep loops of shining black hair. "I'm leaving tomorrow; so that when I got home unexpectedly early from my walk and learned that Mrs. Meredith had come here, it seemed the easiest way to say good-by to you all."

"Oh, it's too bad you're going so soon. You haven't had half a chance to know Maywood." Phoebe's conventionalities carried a slight frigidity of tone. "We are all sorry to hear that."

"Are you? That's nice of you—to say." Very slightly, Miss Storror accented the word *say*. There ensued a brief chill silence.

Miss Storror broke it cryptically. "I think I'll have to do it," she announced. Then without explanation, she turned suddenly on Mrs. Meredith. "Have you ever visited that little town of Bray where I was brought up, Mrs. Meredith?"

"No," Mrs. Meredith answered civilly, "I never have."

"It's a strange little place; dead, dull, uninspired and uninspiring. I've lived there all my life. This is the first time I've ever escaped from it."

"I hope you've had a pleasant visit." There was a faint sarcastic flavor to Phoebe's voice.

"Oh, delightful!" Miss Storrow replied, apparently as insensitive to the sarcasm in Phoebe's words as to the perfunctory quality in her own.

"Maywood," she went on, "is really a delightful place to live in. I don't think you Easterners realize the charm there is to your suburban towns. Our cities are, I think, more brisk than yours. But some of our small towns are deadly. Bray is. I was brought up in a gray, chilling atmosphere. I had no father or mother, or sisters or brothers. I lived alone with an aunt—an old maid of a most pronounced type."

She stopped and looked around the circle as though trying to find response of some kind in the eyes which surrounded her. But none came. The women had resumed their sewing; were looking up at her at intervals with an air of polite attention a little dashed with question. Miss Storrow went on: "I don't remember any color in my childhood or in my young girlhood—any color of *any* description. By color, I mean, actual color and a lot else besides—books, pictures, music, the theater, dancing; and,

above all, beautiful clothes and the admiration of the other sex."

Again she paused. Again she sought the circle of eyes. And now, that interest which she awaited began to shine through the frigid civility of their expressions.

"I never went to parties or to the theater. I never had men call on me. I don't ever remember ever wearing a dress that wasn't a drab horror. I don't remember ever having anybody tell me how to do my hair. Or what colors became me. And yet I loved beauty. Oh, how I loved beauty! How I longed for a mere brilliant, red hair-ribbon—— At eighteen, I was the ugliest, lankiest, most colorless, most awkward, most uninteresting creature that you ever saw in your life. And then, at the precise moment, I complicated matters by falling in love with Jerry."

She paused for the third time. And now, definite interest broke out in involuntary movements among her listeners. They dropped their sewing. They stared at her—frankly astonished.

"Of course, I don't have to tell you that, I being the kind of girl I was, Jerry was the handsomest, ablest, most popular man in town. He had all the charms and all the accomplishments proper to young manhood. I fell in love with him in direct proportion to the degree of his attractiveness. I knew him—but

I had never really talked with him. He knew me—but he had never really looked at me. It was not to be expected that he would; for every beautiful young thing in Bray was ready to fall like a ripe peach into his hand." She broke off suddenly to ask, "Are we likely to be interrupted here, Mrs. Warburton?"

"No," Phoebe answered. "I never receive callers on the Sewing-Club day."

"Oh, in that case——" Miss Storrow's voice tapered off into silence. She put her hands to her ears; removed the jade earrings. Quite calmly, she began to take the hairpins out of her hair.

Nobody spoke. Her audience watched, petrified.

After a few seconds, Miss Storrow resumed her narrative. But all the time, her fingers were traveling with a flashing white swiftness through the flat masses of her dusky hair. The pile of shell hairpins grew on one end of the table, and presently a tiny mound of invisible wire hairpins joined them.

"I was awfully conscious—under my shy awkwardness—that I was a complete failure in every way in which a girl can be a failure. And I was very rebellious about it. One day—I don't know quite how—it occurred to me to wonder if that failure were necessary. There were half a dozen girls in Bray who were extraordinarily successful socially and great favorites with the men. I began to watch those girls.

I studied them with a closeness, a particularity, a constancy which only a woman, dissatisfied, unhappy—and slightly jealous—could study her own sex. And do you know, I came to the conclusion that much of it was the result of system. Not all! There are some women who are born to conquer. It's natural with them. They don't have to think of it. But with the rest, it is a system. And I think I discovered that system. Perhaps I didn't. Perhaps I'm like those people who think they can break the bank of Monte Carlo, try it and fail. But anyway I was convinced that I'd found it, and I was perfectly certain that I could put it into operation. But I had to go to a place where nobody knew anything about me. And it was necessary to have the ground laid and everything prepared for me."

By this time, all the pins had emerged from her hair. A curious figure, in the midst of its shining torrent, she sat for a moment silent.

"I came into a small legacy a few months ago. Instead of putting it to a useful purpose, I decided I would use it proving my point. I had one friend—one true friend—Alice Robinson. I went to Alice and told her my entire plan. I said to her, 'There's only one way in which you can help me, Alice, and that is to send a letter to your friends in the East warning them against me as a flirt.' That was the letter you received from her." Miss Storror

addressed herself directly to Mrs. Meredith. "I know because I wrote it."

"So I came East. I went to New York and spent one solid month just buying clothes—the clothes I'd always wanted and never had. I studied those clothes down to the finest detail. I said to myself, 'Every time I enter a room, it's going to be as though the lights were suddenly turned on!' A clever hairdresser experimented one whole morning, trying to find the most striking way to do my hair. I went to a beauty shop and paid them to teach me how to use cosmetics."

Suddenly Miss Storrow lifted the mass of hanging hair; submitted it to a few slashing strokes of a side comb; pulled it straight back from her forehead. With a few lithe turns of her hands, she coiled it into a stiff, hard knot; pegged it down. "Ladies," she continued, "behold the original Sibyl Storrow."

The metamorphosis was a curious one. The picturesqueness which the flat curved black loops had given to a rather pale face, had entirely disappeared. Her features were without distinction. Her eyes had no beauty to help in illumination. With the earrings gone, she had turned ordinary.

The six women stared at her fascinated.

"You see, I felt if I could come, with all this preparation of clothes and cosmetics, into a community which had been warned of my flirtatious habits, I

could pull off a sensation. And I did it." She paused again; then, " Didn't I? " she demanded.

Phoebe was the first to recover. " You certainly did."

" I might say that I don't expect you women to forgive me," Miss Storrow went on with a smile which was very different from her premeditated vampire sparkle. " But I know that you are going to do it. The instant I laid my eyes on you, I knew you to be a dandy gang of girls. You don't know how much I hated flirting with your husbands. But it had to be done."

Mrs. Meredith smiled. " Yes, I see that."

" What you don't understand is what hard work it was. It really was the hardest kind of hard work. I made a discovery, and I think I have proved it. That discovery is that any woman of intelligence can be a vamp if she will give her whole attention to it and keep on the job every instant. She's got to ignore other women entirely, of course; ride rough-shod over their feelings; behave exactly as if they weren't there. She's got to devote herself to the men all the time. If they start to draw away, she must leap on them like a lion on its prey. Almost any woman who is willing to give all her time to it can do this. But, I reiterate, it's hard work. I have never slaved so in my life. And now I'm going back to Bray——"

"But not before you lengthen your stay," Phoebe interposed. "And give us a chance to get really acquainted with you. Won't you come here to visit me?"

"If I'll give her up," Mrs. Meredith put in gallantly.

"Perhaps we can share her," Phoebe decided it.

"Are you going back to Bray," Mrs. Brodbeck demanded, fascinated, "to dazzle, enchant, and enslave?"

"Precisely that!" Miss Storrow admitted. "Within three days I shall be the talk of the town. Those earrings might just as well be rings of electric lights. That lip stick might just as well be a stick of dynamite. For the first time in its history, Bray'll know I'm there."

"And Jerry?" Mrs. Day queried.

Miss Storrow meditated a moment. And as she meditated, involuntarily, she pulled her hair into long flat loops on her brow; caught them there with invisible pins. That feat accomplished, she sought the lip stick, mechanically applied it. "Yes—Jerry. I don't know whether I want to marry Jerry or not now. My ideas have enlarged. I've seen so many fine men in the meantime. But if I still like him, Jerry is doomed. I suppose in that case he'll propose to me in about a month after I get home."

CHAPTER IX

PHOEBE DISCOVERS HER SON

WHERE is Edward?" Ernest asked Phoebe. "I wanted to tell him—— He isn't so much interested in the tournament this year, is he? He doesn't care so much for tennis as he did, does he?"

"Oh, I don't know," Phoebe said in a tone that held a challenge to argument. "I think he's as much interested as any of the other boys. Of course, losing in both singles and doubles early in the tournament has made some difference."

Ernest did not seem to hear that argumentative note in his sister's voice. His eyes beat back and forth over the wide, open green space between the big, comfortable, yellow-and-white Colonial house and the big, roomy, weather-beaten Colonial barn. The brown rectangles of the two tennis courts only partially filled that space. A match of boys' doubles, Toland and Jim Connors against Tom Furey and Hammond Halliway, was proceeding on one; mixed doubles on the others. Both matches were fringed with groups of children. The girls sat primly on the roofed-over, vine-covered settees at either side. To-

gether, Bertha-Elizabeth and Cely Connors, middy-bloused and taut-tressed in duplicate, with ties, belts, stockings of the same daring scarlet, awaited, racket in hand, the call to the girls' doubles. The boys sprawled on the barbarically-colored Indian blankets that dotted the grass; or they clung to the big gray-lichened rocks that, with an agreeable irregularity, thrust themselves out of the earth. Almost as crowded, grown people sat under awnings, brilliantly striped, in hammocks, vividly cushioned, and on steamer-chairs, gorgeously dotted, on the barn-piazza. At the back of the house, peaceably distant from the noise, a few black-silk old ladies wandered in Phoebe's garden, now a futuristic welter of dahlias and asters.

No more than he caught the question in his sister's voice did Ernest seem to see the changing colorful scene over which his eyes wandered. "I think Jim Connors is going to get the cup all right," he said, mechanically. His eyes fixed for an instant on Tug, who, tilted back to a perilous angle in a chair placed on a table, was umpiring the doubles. At his side was a pail of apples. At regular piston-rod intervals, Tug's arm dropped to it; seized an apple; demolished it in a half-dozen bites. With the same intent, unseeing look, Ernest followed the progress of a pair of maids who, carrying big glass pitchers foaming with milk, emerged from the house and made

towards the barn. "This is the third year—he keeps the cup this time, doesn't he?"

"Yes," Phoebe answered. "Oh yes, Jim will win all right." A protracted rally brought forth a storm of applause, derisive yells, jeers; shouts of approval, cheers. Phoebe waited until it died down. "He's a real tennis player, Tug says. Tug thinks he may be a champion some day." She stopped to laugh a little. "Micah's suddenly got ambitious; he practises day and night. He's playing now with Michael Connors in the other court. Do stop to watch him, Ern. He isn't any taller than his racket."

"Well, I guess I must be going." Ernest's look left the two maids, slid back to his brother-in-law, who was again reaching down into the pail of apples. He transferred his gaze to the grown-up group about him.

It was a clear calm day in late September, so sunny that, beyond the shade of the piazza, parasols bubbled in all the colors of the rainbow and so cool that, within that shade, sport-coats and sweaters displayed every variety of stripe and check. The group of women gathered there had the appearance, typical of young mothers in this day, of looking ten years younger than their own mothers at the same age. Short skirts, trim shoes, bare heads, they might have been the sisters of the prim, correct little girls who fringed the tennis courts.

Apparently Ernest's vision registered none of the scene.

"Oh, you haven't got to go now, Ern," Phoebe remonstrated. "It's early yet."

"Guess I'd better. Maybe I'll be back later. Good-by, Phoebe. Good-by, mother."

"Good-by, Ernie," Mrs. Martin said. "Bring Sylvia back with you."

"Yes, that's what I'm going home for," Ernest replied.

She watched her son's tall straight figure pick its way through the groups of children. "Ernie won't be content until he goes home after Sylvia. He's always wanting her to be in everything. He's a little worried over her," she explained. "He thinks she isn't quite as strong as she should be after the birth of little Sylvia. And he's so foolish, because she's all right."

"*Worried!*" Phoebe exclaimed. "What makes you think he's *worried*, mother? Sylvia's perfectly well. The doctor says she couldn't be in better condition. Has he said anything?"

"No," Mrs. Martin answered. "He hasn't said a word. In fact when he's with me, he makes a point of being particularly cheerful."

"How did you know it, then?" inquired the tall, keen, whimsical-faced gentleman who was Phoebe's father-in-law.

"I don't exactly know how I know, Mr. Warburton," Mrs. Martin confessed. "But Ernie can't fool me and never could. I know what he's thinking and that's all there is to it."

"It's that female business of intuition again," hazarded Mr. Warburton semi-humorously. "You can always—— Pretty play! Tom Furey's game is improving. If Jim doesn't look out, Mrs. Connors, Tom will steal that cup away from him—— That intuition of theirs is the most puzzling thing about women. A man doesn't know what it is, or where it is, or why it is, or how she comes by it, or where it will manifest itself. All he knows is that she's got it and he hasn't. And it's something he can't understand or beat."

"I don't know that I have so much *intuition*," Mrs. Martin stated cautiously, "except where my children are concerned."

"Oh, it's particularly in regard to children," Mr. Warburton elucidated, "that it appears. I've always noticed that my wife knew everything that was going on in Tug's mind long before I knew there was anything going on there."

"Oh, so far as their children are concerned," burst in Phoebe, "women—— When I was a girl, Mother Martin used to make me so *mad!* I never could conceal *a thing* from her. She seemed to read what was going on in my mind just as if it were a

newspaper. I couldn't understand how she did it until I had children of my own. Then suddenly I found I had developed another sense by which I could gather what *they* were thinking."

"One way I could always tell when Phoebe was worried or blue or put out," Mrs. Martin smiled reminiscently, "was that suddenly, for no reason whatever, she'd dress up in all her best things. Many's the time she's come marching into the house, looking very much worked-up or very depressed over something. She'd go upstairs for awhile and when she came down, she'd have on everything she could put on. I wouldn't know sometimes, for a long while, what it was all about, although in the end generally I'd find out. But she never can fool me about her state of mind. Never."

"Don't you be so sure I can't," Phoebe warned her mother. "You must remember that having children of my own has made a *very foxy critter* out of me. I may put something over on you yet."

"I don't expect you'll ever do that, Phoebe," Mrs. Brodbeck remarked. "I'd hate to try to beat your mother's game. She gets things through her pores."

"Mrs. Warburton," said Miss Darling, who was Mrs. Brodbeck's guest, "hasn't your estate grown since I was here some years ago? I don't remember that your land extended to the corner. Of course

that was before I went to Europe and my memory is a little vague——”

“ You are quite right,” Phoebe answered. “ Mr. Warburton was so afraid that this lot would be sold and people would build too close, that he gave it to me for a birthday gift. At first, I had rather romantic plans. I was going to take the old barn down and put in an Italian garden—sunk below the level of the street, with stone seats and a fountain and a sundial and a birds’ bath and all the usual things. But finally, I thought I owed it to the children to make a good play place for them. So I kept the old barn and added two tennis courts.”

“ As I remember,” Miss Darling said, half closing her sharp eyes, “ it was a mass of weeds and bushes.”

“ I should say it was,” Phoebe agreed. “ But oh, it was such fun clearing it up. As we cut down the bushes, all those beautiful rocks came into sight. Some of them had the most lovely lichens on them. At first if any of them scraped off, I used to go out and glue them on again. But I soon got over that habit with the kind of family mine is. But the great discovery was the little pond, way down at the corner in the back. I’d never had the remotest suspicion that there was one there. Of course, the children knew about it, but they had never happened to mention it. It seems that Bertha-Elizabeth waded

through it one day in her bathing suit, to see how deep it was. It only came to her waist. My blood ran cold when she told me that. I'd a vision of her getting caught in the mud."

"Does it dry up in the summer?" Miss Darling asked.

"No, it seems to be fed by springs. We planted pond-lilies and forget-me-nots about the edge. It's really quite lovely in the summer."

"Especially when I cover it with kerosene oil to kill the mosquitoes," interpolated Tug, who had come forward in the rest between matches.

"The barn must be a beauty," Miss Darling said.
"I'm going over and look at it later."

"It's one of the most beautiful old barns in the region," Phoebe declared. "Oh, when I think that I might have sold it or, worse, had it pulled down—— But my guardian angel saved me from that sacrilege. I had those dormer-windows put in; gymnasium upstairs; kitchen downstairs. Then Mrs. Connors and I got up cooking classes for the little girls in the neighborhood. The girls are always making candy there. On Saturdays they often cook their own lunch. The gymnasium is pretty nice, too. Tug took care of that. The children keep many of their toys over there; and all the tennis things. And on rainy days, when the whole neighborhood calls, I have no confusion in the house."

"It's been a blessing to us!" Mrs. Connors said. "My Jim would never have had the chance to play tennis if Mrs. Warburton hadn't made it so that he could. My Cely plays very well, too."

"Well, I certainly gave myself a perpetual birthday gift," Phoebe declared. "It has brought the greatest happiness to both Tug and me to be surrounded by so many children all the time. Oh, there's Miss Sharp!" she exclaimed, inconsequently, "I suppose she's come about—— I wonder if this water is *ever* going to boil!" She busied herself at the capacious table.

That table, a permanent part of the piazza furnishing, was as big as a kitchen table, the top glass-covered. On it stood a brass samovar and files of cups in a durable, primitively-colored peasant ware. Sandwiches piled platters; cookies and crackers filled Indian baskets.

"Well, even electricity isn't quick enough for me," said Mrs. Brodbeck, "I'm simply perishing for my tea."

"It will be ready in a minute," Phoebe explained absently. "I thought I'd turned the electricity on, but I hadn't. I suppose Miss Sharp has come to——" She fixed her eyes on the approaching figure.

Of a thin willowiness, of an anemic blondness, Miss Sharp's elaborate dressing combined the faults

most unhappy for her particular type; skirts too long, hat too broad and both with too much trimming. Everything about her sagged and flopped. Phoebe, herself, for trimness and trigness, made a marked contrast. Her simple navy-blue gown was as short, her slim white boots as high, as fashion permitted. She wore a long cherry-colored silk sweater, tied with a sash in front. Her hair was fluttery with light and shade. Her color, under her vigorous summer tan, was vivid and stable. She arose to greet Miss Sharp.

"I've come about Children's Day, Mrs. Warburton," Miss Sharp explained. "Is Edward here?"

"No," Phoebe answered. "I don't know exactly where he is."

"He doesn't seem so much interested in tennis this year," Miss Sharp commented. "He was just filled with it last year at this time."

"Oh, I think he is," Phoebe answered with a suggestion of curtness. "You see, he lost in both the singles and doubles early in the tournament. So of course he doesn't have to stay about."

"I met Edward just as I was coming in the gate," Mrs. Martin interrupted. "He asked me if I would give him a jar of my apple jelly and piccalilli. Of course I said I would—but what on earth does he want them for?"

"Oh, I suppose he's going on another picnic with

Freddie Freeman," Phoebe replied. "Yesterday he asked me for a jar of strawberry jam. They're always going off into the woods together, and this is probably their last chance this season. The gypsies break camp in a few days, I believe."

"He was just getting on his wheel," Mrs. Martin continued, "when he stopped me. He was headed for the camp. How long have those gypsies been coming to Maywood, Mr. Warburton? They've never missed a summer since we've been here."

"Over a hundred years," Mr. Warburton replied. "I can't remember a time when they didn't come. My father couldn't, for that matter. The two events of the year in my boyhood were when they opened camp in the spring and broke camp in the fall."

"I used to be frightened to death of the gypsies when I was a little girl," Phoebe said. "We had a maid once—you remember that red-headed Delia, mother—who used to threaten to give me away to the gypsies when I was bad. She said they would take me off and never bring me back again. If I thought any of my maids were frightening my children like that— So of course I was just as afraid of them as I could be. When we used to drive past them with you and father in the carryall— *Carryall!* Goodness, how mid-Victorian that sounds—I used to crouch down between you two, hoping they wouldn't see me. But my children seem to be crazy about

them. Of course the boys would be. But even Bertha-Elizabeth is always buying baskets of them. And Hope waves to them whenever we drive by. As for Edward—— Well, the sun rises and sets in Freddie Freeman for him."

"The same with my Jim," said Mrs. Connors, "and young Joe Monahan. They're bewitched by him. Young Freddie has a bold kind of a way with him."

"Edward is lengthening out," Mrs. Martin commented to her daughter and to Mr. Warburton, under cover of a clatter of conversation. "With that slim figure and that heavy hair, there's something almost girlish about him, isn't there?"

"It hasn't occurred to me," Phoebe answered carelessly. "I suppose he looks about as Ernest did at that age." Although she appeared not to take any special interest in the subject, her voice held a real question.

"No, I don't think he does," Mrs. Martin remarked vaguely. "Ernie was always a great, big, heavy boy. I don't think he was ever what you might call so *refined-looking* as Edward. Ernie was such an out-of-doors boy and so fond of sports and, oh dear me, so untidy always. Edward is a regular Martin, though."

Phoebe pursued the subject, but still with the air of one who makes conversation. "I suppose Edward

looks about as Tug did," she said to her father-in-law.

"I don't seem to recall what Tug looked like," Mr. Warburton mused, "but his trouble ran the other way. I was always afraid he was going to be fat. Didn't seem to bother his mother, as I remember."

"I'm glad Edward is slim," Miss Sharp came into the conversation. "I particularly want him to be as slim as possible. You see, I'm going to make Children's Day a harvest home festival this year. I've found the dearest little dialogue that's just suited to my class. All about the harvest and it's being grown from little seeds planted in the spring, and how our lives should be a harvest grown from seeds planted in our childhood. I want Edward to take the principal part. It requires some one particularly—well *aesthetic-looking*—like Edward. I think I shall have him wear long trailing draperies of green with an orange-colored hat, shaped like a pumpkin, and I'll have him carry a sheaf of wheat."

"That will be very pretty," Phoebe said civilly.

"Yes, Edward will be too sweet for words," Miss Sharp prophesied. "I'm glad his hair is so long and wavy; please, dear Mrs. Warburton, don't have it cut before Children's Day." She fumbled in the long bead bag she carried.

Phoebe did not speak for an instant. But her teeth caught first on her lower, then on her upper lip. In the pause came confusion, as one set completed itself and new players filed onto the court. Then, "I have him wear his hair a little long because his ears stick out so, when it's short," she explained.

"I've copied all the parts," Miss Sharp went on, "and I think Edward had better begin studying at once. His is the longest. You see, all the other characters address questions to him, and he explains the principle of the harvest to them. He will have to carry the whole thing. But then, of course, I've always depended on Edward to do that—he seems so much older than the rest."

She put the typewritten manuscript on the table and accepted the cup of tea which Phoebe handed her.

"I'll begin with Edward at once," Phoebe said, sliding a cup under the spigot of the samovar.

"You're awfully kind," Miss Sharp murmured, "as always. I do think it's so wonderful of you and Mr. Warburton to hold this tournament here every Fall—not to speak of letting anybody play on the courts. And then, if that wasn't enough, to offer cups—really, I think you two people are wonders."

"You wouldn't think so," Phoebe affirmed, "if you knew how much fun we get out of it."

"Well, if I can trespass further on your hospitality," Miss Sharp continued, "I'd like to hold the rehearsals here."

"Of course. Any time. The nursery is always at your disposal," Phoebe asserted.

"Oh, thank you again," Miss Sharp said effusively.

"Here's Edward now," exclaimed Mrs. Martin.

Phoebe, still busy at the tea-table, appeared not to hear her mother. But after a while, her eyes raised, watched the boy who was approaching with a look singularly intent.

He was a tall, slender lad. He had the appearance, common to many boys of his age, of being on the verge of shooting out of his clothes. He seemed to grow under your eye. Also, a little, he had the air of a machine whose parts have been selected without reference to each other. His nose seemed too big for his face, his head too heavy for his neck, his arms and legs too long for his body. This sudden disproportion had the effect of breaking into what had been a beautiful childish symmetry, in which the clear gray eyes, shot with gold, and the soft red mouth, enclosing glittering teeth, had perfectly matched a smaller nose; in which head and limbs had perfectly matched a slender torso. His skin was white. His heavy hair, chestnut in the sun, broke into big waves; it was a little long.

He stopped at a group of boys, folded up on the ground beside them to a bunch of sharp angles.

"Edward," Phoebe called in a voice singularly penetrating, "come here."

The sharp angles straightened out. Edward walked to his mother's side, stood waiting. His look, which had carried an element of resolved eagerness, changed subtly as he surveyed the people on the barn piazza; it became impassive. "Son," Phoebe informed him, "Miss Sharp has just brought the dialogue that your Sunday school class is to do on Children's Day. You will wear green robes and an orange-colored hat, shaped like a pumpkin, and you will carry a sheaf of wheat." She watched him intently as she made this announcement.

Edward shifted his weight from one foot to the other. There was no lightening, rather there was a deepening of the impassivity in his look. "Yes; Miss Sharp told me last Sunday," he said. "Can I have some cake?"

"Yes. But first, run into the house and tell Norah that, when the baby wakes up, she can bring her out here. Then you and Bertha-Elizabeth can begin to pour the milk into the glasses. Ask Cely to help you—and Perry and Lawrence. Pass the sandwiches first, and after everybody's had some, the cookies and cakes."

"I think I'll be going," Miss Sharp announced, "I've got to see some more mothers today. Suppose we say we'll have a rehearsal here after school Monday. Good-by, Mrs. Warburton. Good-by, everybody!" She arose.

Phoebe's eyes followed the ungraceful figure as it manoeuvered its way among the groups of children, stopped at Tug's side where he sat, still eating apples.

The afternoon wore on. Phoebe poured cup after cup of tea; until Mrs. Brodbeck insisted on taking her place. The children ate sandwiches and drank milk. Comely buxom Irish Norah came out, carrying Hope; the sleep-scarlet still on her round cheeks and the sleep-stars still in her blue eyes; her golden curls bobbing to Norah's buoyant walk. The baby submitted placidly to her mother's flurry of kisses; to being passed from lap to lap until she reached her final haven in Norah's arms. A girls' doubles followed the boys' doubles, and Cely and Bertha-Elizabeth were ignominiously beaten. A boys' singles went on simultaneously, and little Micah, slim and dark and as incisively cut as a boy-Indian, developed an unexpected cool skill; won brilliantly amidst laughter and applause. But through it all—through even her son's victory—Phoebe remained a little *distracte*.

Phoebe walked slowly into the house after all her guests had gone. She fussed with books and magazines at the big center table; made a preoccupied attempt at putting them in order; desisted suddenly; fell to pacing the floor. Abruptly she stopped at one of the long mirrors which faced each other from the ends of the room. A definite look of unease in her eyes grew to a question. The gray eyes in the glass interrogated her sharply. After a moment of hesitation in which she did not answer that question, she went to the foot of the stairs and called Edward. She called half a dozen times and with a rising emphasis before he answered her. "I was up in the attic, mother, and I didn't hear you at first," he explained finally from over the banister.

"Come down, son," she commanded, "I want to read that Children's Day dialogue to you."

"Yes, mother," Edward answered docilely. He clumped down the stairs and sprawled, like a disjointed bundle of arms and legs, on the couch beside her. Without comment, Phoebe read the dialogue from beginning to end. Edward listened without a ripple of that impassivity which still hung on him. Phoebe waited, after she had finished, as if expecting something. But Edward made no comment.

"Now you read it, son," she said at last, "I want to see if you understand it."

Edward droned his way through the entire dia-

logue. Phoebe corrected a pronunciation here, an inflection there. She made him repeat long passages phrase by phrase. Again when they had finished, she waited. Nothing came. "How do you like it, son?" she asked at last.

"Oh, pretty good," Edward answered noncommittally.

"I guess you'd better take it upstairs into your room and study a little before dinner," Phoebe commanded in impatient tones.

"All right, mother," Edward agreed stolidly.

Alone in the living-room, Phoebe resumed her restless pacing up and down. Once she stopped to stare out the window over the deserted tennis courts to where her husband busied himself with nets and rackets, making order of the confused barn-piazza. And once again, she stopped at the mirror to examine the look of trouble which filled her eyes.

Suddenly she dashed upstairs to her room. There her restlessness concentrated in a frenzy of action. She turned both faucets on in the bathtub and while the water rose to a steaming height, she laid out on the bed an elaborate set of rose-pink underwear, rose-pink silk stockings, rose-pink satin slippers, with big scintillating buckles; an evening dress of rose-pink; a fluttery iridescent ornament for her hair.

"My word!" Tug exclaimed later when he entered the house. "Do you want to put my eye out,

woman? What a gorgeousness! Company? Or—don't tell me we're going out somewhere."

"Neither," Phoebe answered briefly. "I just felt like putting on something pretty after being out in the open air all the afternoon."

Tug groaned in a rapture of relief. "That was a horrid moment! I don't want to wander one inch from my own fireside this evening. But you certainly are some peach! Why don't you dress up like this every evening? That is, if you won't expect me to climb into evening clothes. Isn't that a new dress?"

"Oh, *Tug!*" Phoebe ejaculated. "Don't you know that this is my old pink-and-gold that I had three years ago, made over? Madame Rosalie fixed it up with these maline wings and that cloth of gold girdle."

"It's a perfect pip!" approved Tug. "Oh say, what's Edward's Sunday-school teacher's name?"

"Miss Sharp."

"Sharp! Sure. It ought to be Flat. I never can think of that girl's name. She's one of those people that you forget all about until you see them again. She stopped beside me, while I was umpiring, to bore me with a long account of a dialogue Edward's to take part in. Seems to me he's pretty big for that sort of thing, isn't he?"

"Oh, I don't know that he is," Phoebe said in a formal tone.

"How old is he?" Tug inquired.

"Oh, *Tug!*" Phoebe exclaimed impatiently, "do you mean to tell me you don't know how old Edward is?"

"Sure I know," Tug asserted trenchantly.
"Ten."

"Twelve!" Phoebe corrected him in a resigned tone. "Now let me set you right about your children, Tug."

She recited the statistics with true maternal accuracy and speed. "Haven't you the mental capacity to hold those simple arithmetical facts?"

"I could if they would only stay those ages," Tug defended himself, "but they won't. You mark my words, a year from now it will all be different. It's been like that right along, ever since they were born. But really, Phoebe, I think Edward is too big for this Sunday school dialogue business. That Miss Sharp—geewhillikins, how I despise that girl!—described in great detail a foolish costume he is to wear. And, believe me, if anybody had ever attempted to dress me up like that when I was Edward's age, I'd have committed arson on the family-roof."

"I'm glad my son doesn't have such—such—*fiendish*—impulses," Phoebe declared frostily. "I disagree with you entirely."

"Well, all right! It's up to you. You're his

mother." Tug dismissed the subject blithely. "I'd hate to have a son that was a sissy, though."

"I don't think you need worry about that," Phoebe maintained with extreme hauteur.

She did not take up the subject again with her husband. But that night, when her mother-in-law dropped in for a brief call, she remarked casually, "Dear me, I never saw anything like the way Edward is shooting up. He outgrows his clothes almost while they're trying them on. He must be taller than Tug was at that age."

Mrs. Warburton answered the question in her voice promptly. "I don't know but what he is. But he's not so big *round* as Tug was. Edward's much more delicate-looking—a much prettier boy—if my son will pardon me for saying so."

"Go as far as you like," Tug reassured his mother. "Can't hurt my feelings by not calling me pretty. For my part, I think Edward is too good-looking."

"Well, I don't," his mother declared immediately, "although he's a very handsome boy indeed. No, he isn't like Tug at that age. He's a regular Warburton though, if I do say it. I do like that aesthetic air he has. There's nothing rude or rough or coarse about Edward. I can't imagine him getting into a street fight. Tug was as good a boy as any mother would want, but he certainly was not what you'd call

refined-looking. And then he used to mortify me so much by getting into street fights. There was one time there when there was a different enraged mother coming up to see us every week."

"Well, nobody ever called me a sissy," Tug growled.

"I don't think anybody would ever refer to MY son as a sissy," Phoebe remarked.

"No, he's more a *mother's boy*," decided Mrs. Warburton.

Phoebe turned the subject abruptly and did not refer to it again that evening. But the next afternoon, when her father dropped in for his regular Sunday call, she approached it once more.

"Does it strike you, father, that Edward is unusually tall for his age?"

"Yes," Mr. Martin answered. "He is getting rather weedy, isn't he? He's the first *pretty* boy I've ever seen in this family. Must take after the Warburtons; the Martins have never produced anything but roughnecks. If this keeps up though—there'll be only one job open to Edward—movie-star. I don't see how he can possibly succeed in business with those eyelashes."

Again Phoebe changed the subject abruptly.

"Oh say, Phoebe!" Tug broke in. "You must have had a nightmare last night. I waked up out of a sound sleep suddenly. You were jabbering the

funniest string of stuff—something about Edward. I called to you; but before I could get to your room, you had quieted down again."

"Oh, I remember," Phoebe exclaimed electrically. "Queer, I'd forgotten all about it. Isn't it strange how you do?" Her face took on a reminiscent expression, her voice that softness and slowness with which people recall their dreams. "I thought—that Edward was climbing some stairs—I could hear his feet on every step—there didn't seem to be any end to those stairs—they just broke off in space, way, *way* up—and I was afraid he'd plunge headlong off them. That reminds me, I'd better have Edward recite his part in that dialogue." She went to the foot of the stairs. "Edward," she called. She waited. There was no answer. Again and again she called. Still no answer.

"Did you see Edward go out, Tug?" Phoebe called back into the living-room.

"No," Tug answered, "I haven't seen him this afternoon. Well, I told For——"

"Just after Sunday school," Phoebe reflected aloud, "he went up to mother's for the jelly and piccalilli she promised him. I'm sure he hasn't gone out since."

"Well, I told Fortescue——" Tug began again.

"Edward! Edward!" Phoebe called in a louder voice.

"I'm coming, mother," Edward's voice answered.
"I didn't hear you at first. I was in the attic."

"Well, what in the name of goodness are you doing in the attic all the time?" Phoebe demanded impatiently as her son appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Oh, putting things away—in my trunk," Edward said, "things I don't want until next summer."

"If you would only get rid of all those birds' eggs in your room," Phoebe asserted, "I wouldn't mind if you stayed in the attic all night. But now get your part in the Children's Day dialogue. I want to hear you recite it."

"Yes, mother," Edward said with his customary docility.

For an hour Phoebe drilled him. Once she interrupted herself to say. "You remember, Edward, you are going to wear a long green robe like a girl and a hat shaped like a pumpkin, and carry a sheaf of wheat."

"Yes, mother," Edward repeated monotonously.

"I never listened to such pap in my life," Tug remarked the night of the first rehearsal. "Nobody but that Sharp girl—jiminy crickets, how I loathe that female!—would ever have picked out such a pail of slush. It's all right for the other children; they're so little. Why, the biggest one, Dottie Brod-

beck, only comes up to Edward's elbow—but I hate to hear Edward reciting those silly jingles."

"I think it's very pretty, Tug," Phoebe asserted in a lofty tone. "The effect of the costumes—the silver and black of the others against Edward's green and orange—is quite charming, I think."

"Well, I don't," Tug said. "Edward looks like a fool in that pumpkin hat."

"I don't agree with you, Tug," remonstrated Mrs. Martin. "Edward is such a pretty boy, he couldn't look like a fool in anything. And he's such a good boy! You don't know what a good boy he is! I don't know of any boy of his age who would be so gentle with the other children. A lot of boys wouldn't take part with them, and you couldn't make them."

"Well, I'd respect my son more if he wouldn't," Tug grumbled. "Mollycoddle!"

"Tug Warburton," Phoebe flashed, "don't you *dare* call my son a mollycoddle."

"Say, Phoebe," suddenly exclaimed Tug the next morning at breakfast, "you had that nightmare again last night. Sat up in bed and jabbered the craziest line of stuff I ever heard. All about Edward. You must be working too hard."

"Working too hard!" Phoebe repeated scathingly. "Why, I don't have half enough to do. But

I did have a recurrence of that dream I had the other night. You know the one—I told you about it—of Edward running up the stairs that ended in space."

Somewhere in the middle of the night, Phoebe woke out of sleep with a start. She was sitting upright in bed, staring out through the window onto the blanched moonlit garden. Through the open door that led to Tug's room came the sound of his breathing. Otherwise the house was silent. But Phoebe bent her head to a listening attitude, continued to absorb that stillness, as though hunting for a sound concealed in it. Suddenly she jumped out of bed, stepped into the Chinese slippers which lay at her bedside, slipped into the wadded blue dressing-gown which hung over a nearby chair. She glided quietly through the hall to the foot of the attic stairs. She peered upwards, listening. From above came a faint silvery splash of light. Phoebe waited a moment, and in that moment of intense concentration the clock struck one. Noiselessly she ascended the stairs.

On his knees on the attic floor, a figure bent over a suitcase. Around it lay a miscellany of uncorrelated articles, clothes, preserves, a tin of biscuits, a bottle of ginger ale; a camera, an electric torch, a compass, a magnifying-glass. The figure, pajamas-

clad, was tall and slender. Only the top of the head showed. The hair had recently been cut—hacked apparently by some amateur hand to an erratic brevity. Phoebe—rigid in the doorway—surveyed carefully but swiftly all the details of this picture. Her eyes lingered longest on that chopped head. "What are you doing, Edward?" she asked at last.

Edward started convulsively. The look of terror that his face turned to her, changed to relief when he met his mother's eyes, then to sullen bravado. "Oh, I was just packing up some things," he said hoarsely. Still kneeling, he sat backwards on his legs and continued to gaze defiantly up at her.

"What are you going to do with all those things?" Phoebe demanded. Her eye, roving from her son to the floor, caught on the interior works of a clock, all carefully wrapped in tissue paper; the old revolver that was part of the Warburton stage properties.

Edward wriggled. "Oh, I was just putting them away for the winter!"

"But surely, you weren't putting apple jelly and piccalilli away," Phoebe pursued him remorselessly.

"Well, I thought I'd give *them* to Freddie," Edward said after a pause, in which obviously he beat about in his mind for a convincing explanation.

"You were going to run away from me, Edward," Phoebe accused him pitilessly.

Edward shuffled. "Aw no, I wasn't," he denied weakly.

"Oh yes, you were, Edward," Phoebe renewed the attack. "Don't try to tell me anything different! I know better. Now I see that my son doesn't love me any more. He couldn't——"

Her eye, again wandering, fell on a new object among the litter on the floor. It was a snapshot of herself, Edward's initial effort with his birthday camera. Phoebe had within a month presented each of her children with a picture of herself—a product of the latest and most expensive of Boston's artist-photographers. But apparently Edward preferred the work of his own artistry. Faded in background, the figure taken crookedly, stark in attitude and by some divagation of amateur skill, rendered noseless, Edward had framed it in a hideous brass frame, much too large.

Phoebe plumped down on the floor beside her son. She drew him into her arms. "Oh, Edward, how could you run away from me?" she sobbed. "Haven't I been a good mother? Don't you love me?"

Edward's bosom heaved. But he repressed his own emotion manfully. "Don't cry, mother," he begged. "Of course I do! But, mother, I *will not* take part in another dialogue. It makes a feller too ashamed to be all dressed up with a lot of girls like

that. It was fierce last year when I was only eleven. But now, I'm twelve—— Well, mother, I will not do it! I won't! I was going to run away with Freddie Freeman. And if you try to make me, I *will* run away sometime. And I'll *keep* running away. And you can put me in a reform school, if you want to. I don't care. I won't be in that dialogue. I won't, I won't, I won't!"

Phoebe did not lift her head from her son's shoulder. But she smoothed his hot little head. In spots her hands touched the naked scalp; elsewhere it encountered little hard bunches of hair spurting off at stiff angles.

"You shan't do it, my son," she said. "You shan't. You don't understand. Mother doesn't want you to do anything you hate so. It's only that she didn't realize."

"Another thing, mother," Edward's voice softened for a moment. Then it went on inflexibly. "I will not wear my hair long any more. Makes me feel fierce. Like a sissy. I've had to lick about steen boys for calling me 'Curly-head'! I guess you don't know how mad you get when somebody calls you 'Curly-head.'"

"You shall wear your hair just the way you please." Phoebe's muffled tones were very humble. "How do you like it to be cut?"

"Short—like a boxer," Edward answered definitely.

"You shall go to the barber's the first thing tomorrow after breakfast," Phoebe assured him. "You haven't done it quite right, you see." She held him off at arm's length and looked at him.

From his cropped head, Edward's ears stood out like bat's wings. The elision of his hair seemed to have wiped out the remaining infantile values in his expression. All its disproportionate qualities were, in an equal ratio, exaggerated. His nose seemed even bigger in comparison with the rest of his features, but it matched the new look in his eyes and on his lips. Nobody could possibly call him "a pretty boy" now.

When Phoebe reached her room, she turned on the light, stood before the mirror, re-braiding the tumbled amber torrents of her hair. Her eyes showed the signs of weeping, but they shone like wet stars. And all the time, happy smiles kept rippling her lips until her face broke in a big glare of happiness.

"Oh, Tug," Phoebe said casually the next morning at breakfast, "I suppose you were right and I was wrong about Edward's being in that dialogue. We've just had a little talk. Edward says he feels

too big to do that sort of thing, and I told him he needn't."

Tug beamed. "Good for son!" he exclaimed.

"I've just written Miss Sharp. And last night he asked me if he could have his hair cut short to his head. It seems he hates it the least bit long."

"So do I," agreed Tug.

"He got up at seven to go down to the barber's to get it done."

"Well, young man, what's become of your hair?" his grandmother Martin exclaimed, when Edward came into the living-room that afternoon after school.

"Oh, I had it cut this morning," Edward explained simply. "Say, grandmother, your apple jelly was great! I ate the whole jar at recess this morning—me and Freddie Freeman."

"Edward asked me," Phoebe added, as her son left the room, "if he could get out of that dialogue for Children's Day. He said he just hated to do it, and I told him he could."

"Well now, Phoebe," Mrs. Martin said reassuringly, "don't let that worry you. I know exactly how you feel about it. Of course, you'd rather he'd do things like that and be a credit to you, and of course you'd rather he'd wear his hair the way you like it. And I don't blame you. Any woman would

feel the way you do. I hadn't realized what prominent ears he has. He must take that from the Warburtons. But there comes a time in a boy's life when he wants to dress the way he likes, and nothing will change him. I went through it with Ernie, and Mrs. Warburton told me she went through the same thing with Tug. I know just how you feel about it, but there's no use in fretting. They *will* have their own way about certain things."

At the end of this speech, Phoebe contemplated her mother for an amazed interval. Suddenly she broke into laughter. "Oh, Mother Martin, I feel as tickled as punch. I've done it! I've done it! I never thought I could, but I have. I've put something over on you at last!"

CHAPTER X

HOW IT CAME

"OLD Mrs. Bassett called here yesterday afternoon, Edward," Mrs. Martin remarked to her husband one morning at breakfast.

"Why do you say '*old* Mrs. Bassett'?" Mr. Martin queried.

Before she could answer, the telephone, on the table at Mrs. Martin's right, rang. She took up the receiver. "Oh, good morning, Mrs. Martin!" came from it. "I'm so glad that I got you."

"Good morning, Mrs. Brodbeck!" Mrs. Martin answered.

"It's an unearthly hour to telephone, but I simply couldn't let you get away before I'd nailed you. I hope I didn't get you out of bed. I've called you up to ask if you'll serve on that Social Insurance committee?"

"I don't want to serve on any committee," Mrs. Martin objected. "I'm awful busy these days just being a happy grandmother."

"I know you are," Mrs. Brodbeck agreed sympathizingly. "But you are the only one that's got

any hold on the subject. Say yes, please. You're always such a helpful darling!"

"I suppose I'll have to," Mrs. Martin admitted with resignation. "I've been trembling in my boots for fear this would come."

"That's a duck!" Mrs. Brodbeck approved. "You're chairman. Will you have the committee meetings at your house? The other members are—have you a pencil there?"

"Yes." Mrs. Martin reached for the pad and pencil which hung suspended from the telephone; made a few quick notes. "All right! I'll get them together in a day or two."

"I was waiting for that," Mrs. Martin continued as though there had been no interruption. "But I used the term—what is it they say at the women's club?—oh yes, *advisedly*. I said *old* because she is old. She was only middle-aged a few months ago. But now she's old."

"What did it?" Mr. Martin asked, a little absently. His attention seemed concentrated on his grapefruit.

"I don't *know* what it was in her case," Mrs. Martin answered in a meditative tone. "But I *think* it was—" Mrs. Martin took up the receiver again at a second sharp ring of the bell. "Oh, Mrs. Martin," came Mrs. Day's fluty voice, "would you give me your rule for mincemeat?"

That pie the Sewing-Club had at Phoebe's the other day was so delicious, and Phoebe said it was your recipe—that you actually made it for her. If you have any objection to giving it——”

“ Of course I haven't! ” Mrs. Martin insisted indignantly; “ and I'll come over and make the first batch for *you*, if you'd like.”

“ Oh, you angel! ” Dolly Day exclaimed. “ I'll be grateful to you as long as I——”

“ Yes, it was worry,”—Mrs. Martin took up her conversation just where she left it,—“ worry over Annette's illness. I have watched so many people take the jump from middle age to old age. And there are so many different ways it is done. Sometimes it comes as the result of grief—or strain—or sickness. Oh, Edward! ” Her voice suddenly developed a note almost youthful in its poignant quality. “ How I do hate to grow old! Old age—I hate those two words! I have the shivers whenever I think of them! *Old age!* How I dread it! Edward, I can't tell you *how* I dread it.”

Mr. Martin looked at his wife strangely for a moment. Something seemed about to burst from his lips; a something abrupt, sententious, conclusive. But he checked himself; obviously said something that was a substitute.

“ There are other ways in which it comes, besides grief——” he began.

But the telephone burred interruption again. "Oh, Mrs. Martin, good morning! I've just had a barrelful of wonderful pine-cones sent me from California—the biggest and the most gorgeous ones I've ever seen in my life. I'm sending you over a basketful. They look wonderful heaped on both sides of the fireplace. I know you'll love them."

"You were saying, Edward," Mrs. Martin broke out instantly on the tail of her thanks, "that old age came in other ways besides grief——"

"Or strain or sickness," Mr. Martin ended.

"I'd like to know how," Mrs. Martin demanded after a baffled instant. "What do you mean?"

"Wait and see," Mr. Martin admonished.

"Perhaps it isn't old age that I dread so much," Mrs. Martin became more and more analytic, "but that horrid interval when we realize that we're growing old. It's like the way we felt——"

Again Mrs. Martin seized the peremptory receiver. "Oh, Mrs. Martin! It's me—Annie Doyle. Little Theresa's front tooth is loose. It's the first one. And I don't know whether to pull it—or let it come out just natural-like. Is she likely to swally it in her sleep? What do you think, woman dear?"

"I'd pull it," Mrs. Martin advised. "Tie a thread at one end to the tooth, Annie, and at the other to the doorknob, and then close the door——"

"—on that trip to Jamaica," she went on

smoothly, "when we were nearly wrecked and they transferred us from the *Stockton* to the *Martinez* in mid-ocean. I wasn't afraid when I was on the *Stockton* and I wasn't afraid when they got us on the *Martinez*. But on that little boat between—well, I was scared nearly out of my five senses. And I feel exactly like that when I think of crossing the bridge between middle age and old age. I feel as though it were going to hurt."

"Well, Bertha, don't think that you're the only one who's having these thoughts—damn that telephone! Why do you answer it so early?"

"I don't mind it at all. I like it. Oh, good morning, Mrs. Winter!"

"Oh, Mrs. Martin, I've called you up about those layettes that you made up for the Swanson people at the time of the flood last year—everybody says that they were so satisfactory. And I've got to send some to Nebraska—you know, the place where that terrible tornado happened! Will you send me a list of the articles?"

"I was about to say and will continue to try to say—" Mr. Martin took it up when Mrs. Martin had finished dictating the list—"even if my wife is the most popular woman in Maywood—that there are others who feel the same way—among them your affectionate husband."

"At least," Mrs. Martin said, "we've got each

other. Well, I don't know when old age will come, of course—all I do know is that I hate the thought of it."

Again Mr. Martin looked strangely at his wife and again, obviously, he crushed something back.

"Do you know what day this is?" Mrs. Martin suddenly demanded.

"Yes, Bertha-Elizabeth's birthday."

"You know that we're going to Phoebe's to dinner tonight?" Mrs. Martin stated questioningly.

"I've not forgotten," Mr. Martin replied briefly.

"Of course I've bought Bertha-Elizabeth a little present. But I think it would please her, Edward, if you got her something special yourself."

"Oh, that was all attended to—weeks ago," Mr. Martin asserted comfortably.

He volunteered no confidences, however. This time it was Mrs. Martin who looked strangely at Mr. Martin. And for an instant something, ultimately unsaid, beat for egress at her lips. "Oh, of course! You and Bertha-Elizabeth!" she substituted indulgently. "She's your favorite grandchild—and you know it, Edward Martin."

"No, I have *no* favorite grandchild," Mr. Martin asserted forcibly.

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Martin teased him. "Everybody knows she's your pet. Everybody speaks about it! Phoebe wants to have the dinner rather early;

so both the babies can be there. Will you be able to get that five-ten train, Edward?"

"I can't be quite sure yet," Mr. Martin replied.
"But I'll try."

When Mr. Martin left, Mrs. Martin watched from the window until her husband had disappeared. Then she flew to the telephone.

"Phoebe," she called into it, "don't you think you ought to tell your father? I've a feeling that he's going to take it awfully hard."

"Now, Mother Martin, if you go ruining my surprise——"

"I won't say a word to him, Phoebe, but I *don't* think you are making it a pleasant occasion for him. You remember how he carried on when you——"

"It's all right, mother. I'm sure of that. Don't bother about it any more. The children will be over in a few minutes."

"All right," Mrs. Martin said in a resigned voice to Phoebe's first statement and "All right!" in a delighted one to her second.

The house was quiet for a while, except for Mrs. Martin's colloquies with the maids in the kitchen; her long telephone consultations with the butcher, the grocer, the confectioner. Then throwing on a sweater, she went into the garden; plucked an armful of the thinning autumn growths. She repeated this process until the entire lower floor bloomed

with the fall colorings. At about nine, the bell rang.

When Delia opened the door, the procession of the Martin grandchildren seemed to extend from the steps to the gate. Phoebe's youngest boy, the wiry, straight-haired Micah, stood with his hand still on the bell; like a bronze of a boy. Edward, gray-eyed and red-lipped, with lashes so long they made a violet contrast with his cropped head, was spinning a top on the concrete path. Long, lean, lanky; in the husky-voiced shooting-limbed period of adolescence, but still a freckly, snub-nosed replica of his father, Toland came next. Toland was trundling, with many strange jerks and sudden full stops, a perambulator, which contained the youngest Warburton baby, Titian-headed Aline. As he approached, the reason for his flounderings became evident. Little golden-haired Hope stood within the frame of the carriage-handles and, fondly believing herself to be the sole means of its locomotion, was pushing it forward with such erratic upheavals of baby strength that occasionally it nearly threw her headlong. Behind this came the Martin perambulator, in which lay Ernest's youngest—a little, brown butter-ball of a baby—black-eyed Dorcas. Her two sisters, jumping rope, formed an acrobatic bodyguard; Elizabeth-Marian, a slender elf of a child, of so exquisitely pale a blonde coloring that it was as though she were

made of silver tissue; and Sylvia, brown-haired and gray-eyed, a typical little Puritan maiden in her plain navy-blue cape, her severe Dutch crop, and her serious brows. Bringing up the rear, lost in baseball argument, strolled the Martin twins; big, full-bodied adolescents now; bursting with vitality.

It was not alone to the small army of Martin grandchildren that Delia opened the door, but to a confusion which seemed immediately to raise in the old house echoes of a long dead excitement.

"Wheel the carriages right into the living-room, Delia!" Mrs. Martin ordered, out of the confusion of greetings and kisses. "I'll keep the babies down here with me. The rest of you can do exactly as you please." She established red-headed, gray-eyed Aline at one side of the room, and brown-eyed, shock-headed Dorcas at the other. They babbled and bubbled at each other in a vain effort to establish communication.

The others trooped in the accustomed way upstairs to the nursery. Mrs. Martin followed. The little girls gravitated instantly to the corner which held, neatly ranged, a large family of dolls; their wardrobes; their housekeeping arrangements. The little boys made for a shelf, piled with games. The older ones seized the football paraphernalia; slid clatteringly down the backstairs to the yard.

"I can't stay here long, grandma," big Toland ex-

plained in his husky, changing voice. "But there is a book here on Dutch history that I want to look something up in. I've got to write a composition. Do you remember the name, grandma? That one that grandpa's so crazy about?"

"'The Rise of the Dutch Republic,'" Mrs. Martin answered.

"Sure! that's it!"

"It's downstairs in the library, Toland, on the shelf near the side window," Mrs. Martin directed absently. She looked about at the quiet room for an instant; then noiselessly descended the stairs. In the living-room, Delia was just handing Dorcas a bottle. Aline was still bubbling and babbling. Mrs. Martin lifted the great copper-headed, purple-cheeked baby out of the carriage; walked half a dozen times the length of the two rooms.

"You great big girl!" she apostrophized her grandchild, "are you going to be a giantess?—Grandma could eat her *alive* she's so sweet. Oh, there's Mrs. Eaton coming up the walk, Delia. You go to the door; Dorcas will take care of the bottle now."

"Oh, Mrs. Martin," Mrs. Eaton said, "I've called for the slip of that English ivy you said you'd give me the other day. My soul and body, what a stunning kid Aline is! She looks like a Sir Joshua Reynolds."

"Isn't she beautiful?" Mrs. Martin agreed proudly. "Delia, get me the scissors, please!" Still carrying her grandchild, she gave directions for the cutting of a slip from the big pot of ivy which grew in the corner.

The morning wore on. Mrs. Martin took up one baby, then the other. She was interrupted both from within and without a dozen times. Augmenting confusion upstairs occasionally called her to the adjustment of internecine strife. Neighbors dropped in; one to invite her and Mr. Martin to dinner, to meet an old friend from their Middleton days; another, suddenly called on to preside at a committee meeting, to get a little training in parliamentary law. But all of the time, the preparations for luncheon went on smoothly. And at one, the ten of them sat down to a grandparently repast which began, hygienically enough, with chicken soup and ended with a grand flourish of ice-cream, cakes, fruit, candy, nuts.

As Mr. Martin came up the walk to Phoebe's house that evening, the door opened and Phoebe, herself, came running through the garden to meet him.

"Welcome, father!" she called. "And good for you! You got that early train, after all."

"Greetings! Yes, one hour ago, I thought I couldn't make it. But here I am."

It was a sharp November twilight. Large single star-tapers had begun to flame; and already that thread of green gold, which was the crescent moon, was retreating before their light. Phoebe wore no wrap. Her silvery evening-gown bared a bronze-brown square of her neck; covered her shoulders with mere floating films. She linked one vigorous round arm with her father's. But as she walked up the path, the keen dusk seemed but to make her gray eyes more brilliant, to deepen that permanent bloom in her cheeks.

"Do you know, Edward C. Martin, that you are the best father I've ever had?" she remarked in a coaxing tone. She rubbed her chin on his shoulder.

"Experience has taught me," Mr. Martin announced, "that there's an object in this flattery. I throw up my hands at once. What is it you want now?"

"Nothing," Phoebe asserted promptly and trenchantly. "Only an answer to a direct question," she immediately contradicted herself. "Father, your only daughter is suffering from an attack of jealousy. And of whom do you suppose? Her own child. Father, do you love Bertha-Elizabeth more than you love me?"

"Certainly," Mr. Martin replied with a promptness and trenchancy equal to Phoebe's own, "a hundred times more."

Phoebe laughed. "I've long suspected it." She gave her father's arm a little loving squeeze and his hand, that by this time clasped hers, an approving pat.

"Has she had a nice birthday?" Mr. Martin asked.

"Oh, lovely!" Phoebe answered offhandedly. "Luncheon of sixteen girls—and, believe me, father, it was *some* luncheon. And of course, loads of presents and telephone messages all day long. Bertha-Elizabeth seems to be very popular. It's a little strange to me—considering her type—"

"It isn't strange to me," asserted Mr. Martin.

"You're prejudiced, old dear!" Phoebe laughed. "But I must say your affection seems to be returned in kind. She could have had a dance tonight, but she preferred a family dinner—so that she could be with you, I think. To be sure, her father said he'd give her the dance later."

In spite of the vivacity of her mood and the volume of her silvery mirth, there was something placating about Phoebe's manner. And as, just within the door, Mr. Martin drew off his greatcoat, she suddenly threw her arms about his neck; kissed him again and again; kissed him with a gentle tenderness, very different from the bear-hugs to which usually she submitted him. In the living-room, "Well,

Edward," Mrs. Martin greeted him placidly, "you did make it, didn't you? I knew you would."

After forty years of marriage, Mr. Martin had accustomcd himself to the ease with which women accept sudden, revolutionary office-adjustments. He did not debate now. "Hello, Ern! Tug!" he greeted his son, and son-in-law and, to the pink vision between them, "Sylvia, my dear, how pretty you look. I gather from the racket upstairs that we are here in force. Where's Bertha-Elizabeth?"

"She'll be here soon," Phoebe answered. Her air of suppressed excitement seemed suddenly to burst before their eyes. She darted into the hall and produced a series of deep reverberant summonses from the Chinese gong suspended there. Instantly the pandemonium above broke into the staccato of a rush for the stairs. The grandchildren came filing down.

Mr. Martin eyed the gala procession. "Where's Bertha-Elizabeth?" he again demanded.

"Oh, she'll be here in a moment," Phoebe replied evasively; but still visibly she boiled with excitement.

"Mother, you're to sit here. Bertha-Elizabeth is at the head of the table. Father, you are on her right and Ernest is at her left. Sylvia, you're to be on one side of Hope and mother on the other. You two are to keep her in order, if you can. Now, youngsters, run around the table and find where your names are written."

The tramping of adolescent feet; the pattering of baby-steps; the questions and answers; the scraping of the chairs died into silence.

"Now, Bertha-Elizabeth!" Phoebe called into that silence.

There came a sound of swift footsteps in the hall. A girl appeared in the doorway; a young girl, and a slim one. Her little face, lighted by big, very serious, blue-gray eyes and colored by a big, very serious deep-pink mouth, showed a kind of angelic angularity. She wore a yellow evening-gown, high-lustered and floating. At the top, it scooped out delicate crescents of her slim neck and her slim back. At the bottom, it not only touched the ground; but actually lay on it in little ripples of silky light. It made her very tall, that long dress; and as though to supplement it, her amber-brown hair—almost but not quite straight—had been drawn in a thick coiled mass to the very top of her head.

Bertha-Elizabeth stood very still in the doorway. She looked straight into her grandfather's eyes. Her lips smiled, but her eyes questioned. After their first glance at her, Mrs. Martin and Phoebe turned to watch the effect on him.

Mr. Martin stared, stupefied, an instant. Then suddenly that stupefaction changed to a smile of delight. "Who is this woman?" he demanded of his daughter.

Bertha-Elizabeth did not wait for Phoebe's answer. She ran to Mr. Martin's side, threw her arms around his neck. "Do you like my gown, grandpa?" she demanded breathlessly. "And my hair?"

"I think it's great!" Mr. Martin answered, "and very becoming. And your hair looks as pretty as it can look. My eye, I had no idea you were so tall! And I can't tell you how glad I am to have you a grown woman at last. Now we can go off on some real sprees together."

"Oh, Father Martin!" Phoebe remonstrated. "Are *you* going to keep surprising me, too? As though it weren't enough to have Mother Martin all the time flashing something I didn't expect. I thought you were going to make an awful fuss because I'd put Bertha-Elizabeth in a long gown. You certainly raised enough row when I wore my first long dress."

"Did I?" Mr. Martin asked.

"*Did you!*" Phoebe made a little clucking sound in her throat. "Edward C. Martin, I repudiate you. You've forgotten all about me. It's just as though you had never had me at all. You've let Bertha-Elizabeth fill my place entirely."

"Well, didn't you put Tug in my place?" Mr. Martin demanded acutely.

"I guess I sorta did," Phoebe admitted. "And now look at me! Watch him bringing my gray hairs, with wrinkles, to a speedy grave."

"I must confess, Edward," Mrs. Martin said on their way home, "that you really surprised *me* tonight. I felt as though you actually liked Bertha-Elizabeth being grown up."

"I do," Mr. Martin answered promptly.

"Well now, why?" There was a note of irritation in Mrs. Martin's voice.

"Oh, I don't know why," Mr. Martin replied vaguely. "You never can tell the reason for these things. All I know is that I feel that way."

"You certainly are different from me," Mrs. Martin said in a tone slightly disapproving. "Why, when I went over there early this afternoon and saw that child grown into a woman, right before my eyes, as you might say, I burst out crying. I wouldn't have done it for anything, if I'd had a chance to think, because it made Phoebe cry, too. And the two of us, carrying on like that, frightened Bertha-Elizabeth almost to death. The first thing I knew she was crying too. And all the time I was worrying about you coming in and finding her in that long skirt and with her hair done up. Phoebe was determined to surprise you. I begged her not to. But she *would* do it. It shows that, in some ways, she knows you better than I do. I argued with her. I told her that I was absolutely sure it would spoil your evening. Why, Edward, when I saw your eyes light up the way they did, I could have beaten you."

"Well, I'm sorry," Mr. Martin said with a touch of satire, "that I didn't break down and sob—if that's what you women expected of me."

But if Mr. Martin were in any real doubt in regard to his psychological condition, he did not long maintain that state of mind. The clearing-up process was, however, a subtle and complex business. But although for several days it occupied all his mental leisure, he never spoke of the matter to Phoebe; he never spoke of it to his wife. Those two were always teasing him by asserting that Bertha-Elizabeth was his favorite grandchild. He had always denied this accusation stoutly. Nevertheless it was true. Bertha-Elizabeth was the first grandchild. That was not the whole, nor the main reason why she held her special place in his heart. The real reason was that he thought he saw in her all he loved most in both his wife and his daughter. Bertha-Elizabeth had much of Mrs. Martin's steady seriousness of character. She had much of Phoebe's vibrant radiance of spirit. But Mrs. Martin's beautiful seriousness was, in Bertha-Elizabeth, transfused by a quick, avid intelligence. And Phoebe's flamboyant radiance was, in Bertha-Elizabeth, toned to a fine, still luster. All the sixteen years that Bertha-Elizabeth had been growing up, Mr. Martin had had the feeling that he was seeing

not only his daughter's girlhood (the history of which was written in letters of fire on his heart) but his wife's girlhood (which was all mystery and conjecture to him). Now Bertha-Elizabeth had reached the exact point where his friendship with the lovely girl, who had been Bertha Brooks and was now a wife of more than forty years, had begun. Now Bertha-Elizabeth had reached the exact point where his intimacy with the adorable being, who had been Phoebe Martin and was now a daughter of almost forty years, had raised to its sweetest level. In Bertha-Elizabeth's future, he would watch the development, in duplicate, of these two beautiful girlish eras.

A few days later Mrs. Martin strolled over to her son's house to make one of her rare calls. The door was open. Maggie, rubbing vigorously, was shining its brightwork.

"Oh, Mrs. Martin," she apprised the caller regretfully, "Mrs. Martin ain't in. She'll be turrible sorry to miss you."

"Oh, I'm sorry too, Maggie!" Mrs. Martin said. "Is she coming back soon or is she gone for the afternoon?"

"She said she wouldn't be back until six," Maggie replied. "She's just after leaving. She's gone over to Mrs. Parker's. She took the three little girls with

her. You go right in, Mrs. Martin, and make yourself at home."

"I guess I will sit down for a while, Maggie," Mrs. Martin agreed. "I feel a little tired."

"I'll folly you in a minute and make you a cup of tea," Maggie promised in friendly Irish fashion. "That'll fix you!"

"All right," Mrs. Martin approved. "Tea will taste good, Maggie. Where are the twins?"

"Upstairs," Maggie replied, "and up to some divilment to be sure. Why'd they be staying in the house, if they was up to any good? They gave me my orders not to come upstairs for one hour and I'll folly them orders, believe me. They ain't over and above carrying me downstairs if they don't want me there. The strong young divils that they are. They're almost grown men. But perhaps they'll leave you come up though."

One of the twins interrupted from above. "That you, grandma?" he called. "Come right up! Edward's here with me. We're going to tell you a secret. But you've got to promise that you won't give us away to father or mother! Promise *first!*"

The two ruddy, olive-dark faces, bursting with a plum-like color in cheeks noticeably downy, and illuminated by large, clearly-glittering gray eyes, hung for a mischievous interval over the banister.

"I promise," Mrs. Martin agreed recklessly.

The faces disappeared. Mrs. Martin went up the stairs.

"In the bathroom," Gordon's voice called. Mrs. Martin followed its clear trail. It led her to an open doorway.

The twins had dragged a big table into the middle of the room. On it lay instruments of a shining familiarity. As she gazed astounded, Edward lathered his face with four slashing strokes of the brush. Expertly enough, Gordon was slapping the razor over his father's strop.

"Grandma," Edward said in the tone of *blague* which prevailed to the finest ramification in the Martin family, "it's your privilege to be present at a great historical event—our first shave."

When Mr. Martin arrived home that night, his wife met him at the door.

"What makes your eyes shine so, Bertha?" he demanded.

Mrs. Martin did not speak for a moment. She linked her arm with her husband's; clung to him as they walked into the dining-room. "Edward, what do you suppose happened to me today?"

"Somebody left you a million dollars," Mr. Martin guessed.

"Much more thrilling than that," Mrs. Martin said with one of her unexpected touches of humor.

"Shoot!" Mr. Martin adjured. "Put me out of my misery."

"I sat in the bathroom with Gordon and Edward this afternoon—and by special invitation, mind you—while they shaved themselves for the first time."

Mr. Martin bore this revelation with a becoming fortitude. In fact, he only grunted.

"Edward, I can't tell you how excited I was about it. It sort of—if you understand what I mean—*thrilled* me. I don't understand why—I really don't. Why, when Ernie shaved for the first time, I cried all night long because I thought I'd lost my little boy."

"Did you?" Mr. Martin unconcernedly asked.
"I don't remember."

"Well, I do!" A touch of grimness tautened Mrs. Martin's voice. "And the strange part of it all is that I've had a sort of reawakening of that old pain all day long. And yet I didn't feel the least bit like that about Gordon and Edward. It was all so queer. Ernie shaved the first time in secret. I just found it out by accident. He'd have died if he'd known I saw him. And I never told him I did. But the twins didn't mind me at all. They only made me promise not to tell their mother. It's different being a grandmother from being a mother. Somehow I think they trust you more."

"Of course they do!" Mr. Martin said with

fervor. "Why, Bertha-Elizabeth tells me things that she never tells——" He stopped.

"Oh, you two!" Mrs. Martin exclaimed with a great deal of mock indignation and a tiny percentage of real jealousy. "How fine you feel with all your secret understandings! But do you know, Edward," she reverted to her own experience, "I didn't have a single feeling of sadness about the twins growing up. It gave me the greatest sense of joy. Perhaps it was because I don't feel wholly responsible for them. And then the thought of them being able to take care of themselves—and carrying the line on—I don't know how to explain it, but it was as though it lengthened my life—my life and your life—as though we'd achieved something—something that was beautiful and complete."

"Edward," Mrs. Martin broke into her husband's reading just before they were going to bed, "do you remember what I said to you the other day about making that leap from middle age to old age?"

Mr. Martin nodded.

"Well, today when I watched those boys shaving, I suddenly had a sort of revelation. Why, Edward!" She paused. Then in a voice that lowered and rounded, she said, "*This is old age.*"

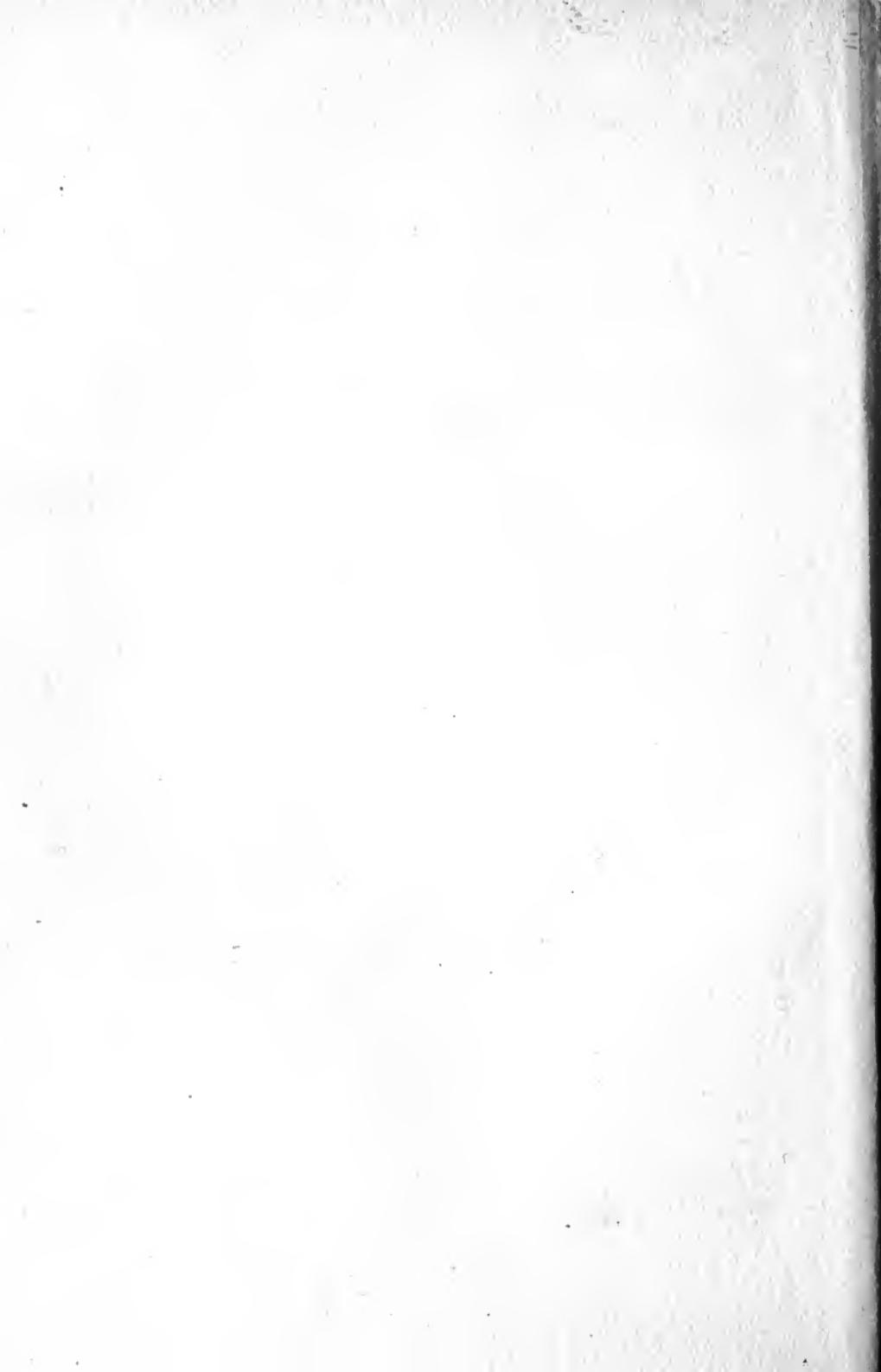
Mr. Martin did not seem surprised. But he did not speak. He smiled across the table at her.

"Yes, *this* is old age!" Mrs. Martin had not extracted all the glory from her revelation. "This beautiful world, surrounded by young, growing things, children and grandchildren—living a life more busy and useful in some ways than the life of our youth—*this* is old age."

Tears arose in Mr. Martin's eyes. They did not dim his smile, though. By a kind of magic they seemed to deepen it.

"Yes, Bertha, *this* is old age. Or it is what we thought was old age. What is old age anyway? The trouble with the world is that it has always accepted youth's definition. But I'm wondering about that. Sometimes I think the supreme revelation of life is that there is no such thing as old age. Sometimes I think we ought to call it young age."





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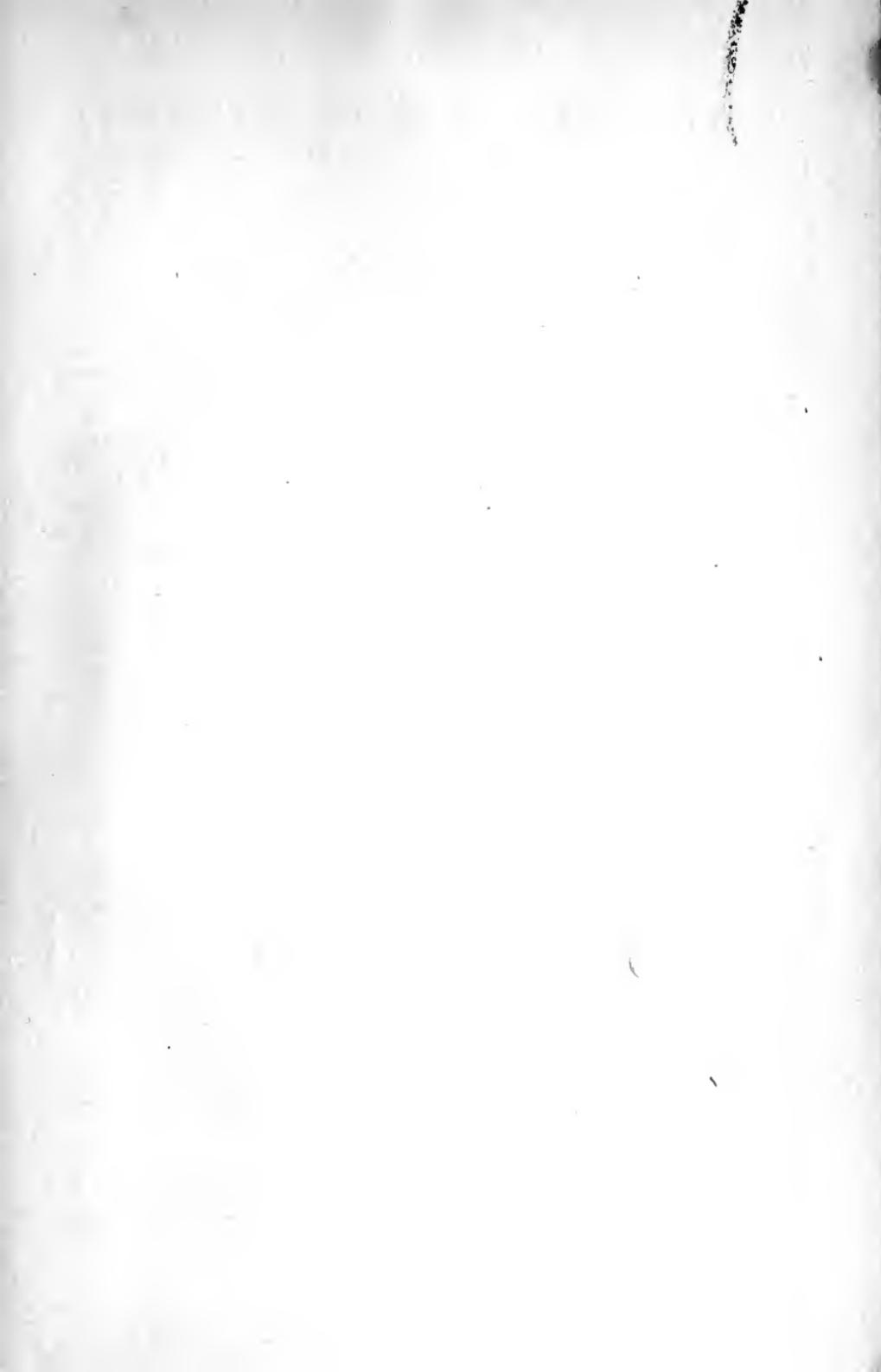
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